Bengaluru Monday, December 22, 2025 Pages 16 Vol 78 No 352 ₹7

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DH

DECCAN HERALD

The Power of Good

'Confusion over K'taka leadership not at high command level'

Cong president Mallikarjun Kharge says problem exists at 'local level'

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Sports

Australia crush England by 82 runs, retain the Ashes P.13

Business

Tariff effect: Tiruppur struggles as orders from US dry up P.10

Nation

Aravalli: Centre rejects mining charge P.5

State

New BIS rules to end hospital billing woes P.3B

Quickly

Pregnant woman killed over marriage

A 20-year-old pregnant woman succumbed to injuries at a hospital in Hubballi on Sunday after she was attacked by her parents and relatives over her inter-caste marriage. The victim, who belonged to Lingayat community, had married a person from the SC community against the wishes of her family. Details on Page 3A

Prez gives assent to G RAM G Bill

The President has given her assent to the Viksit Bharat – Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) or Bill, 2025, which has now become the VB-G RAM G Act, 2025, and will replace the MGNREGA. The President gave her assent to the new law on Saturday, said a gazette notification issued by the Union Ministry of Law and Justice on Sunday. Details on Page 8

RSS chief for Hindu unity in Bengal, B'desh

If all Hindus stand together, it will not take time to change the situation in West Bengal, said RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat in Kolkata on Sunday. He said attempts to understand the RSS through the lens of the BJP were a huge mistake. He also said Hindus around the world would have to help the community in Bangladesh. Details on Page 5

Quotes above govt estimates

1st package **24%** higher | 2nd package **28%** higher

4 companies participated in tenders

QUALIFIED: Adani Group, Hyderabad-based Vishwa Samudra Engineering Ltd

DISQUALIFIED: Dilip Buildcon, Rail Vikas Nigam Ltd (RVNL)

Adani lowest bidder for B'luru tunnel road

Group quotes Rs 22,267 cr against govt estimate of Rs 17,698 cr

DH EXCLUSIVE

NAVEEN MENEZES
BENGALURU, DHNS

Land inside the Lalbagh Botanical Garden marked for the proposed tunnel road. DH FILE

Design, construction of three-lane underground twin-road tunnel

Work	Adani Group (L1)	Vishwa Samudra (L2)	Govt estimates
Hebbal (Esteem Mall) to Seshadri Road	₹10,867 cr	₹12,432 cr	₹8,770 cr
Seshadri Rd to Madiwala (St John's Hospital)	₹11,400 cr	₹13,042 cr	₹8,928 cr

#L1: lowest bidder #L2: second lowest bidder

The Adani Group has emerged as the lowest bidder for both packages of the 16.75-km tunnel road project, according to well-informed sources aware of the financial bids opened by the Bengaluru Smart Infrastructure Ltd (B-SMILE).

The ports-to-power conglomerate's bid is about 24% higher for the first package and 28% higher for the second than the government's estimates—a gap that could prompt authorities to seek the state Cabinet's approval on the tenders' fate.

M Maheshwar Rao, Chief Commissioner of the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA), who is also the Managing Director of B-SMILE, declined to comment.

The government estimated the entire project to cost Rs 17,698 crore, while the Adani Group has quoted Rs 22,267 crore.

In all, four infrastructure companies had participated in the tenders for the project, which has been proposed under the build-operate-transfer (BOT) model. While 40% of the funding will come from the government, the rest will be raised by the private concessionaire.

During the technical evaluation, the Adani Group and the Hyderabad-based Vishwa Samudra Engineering Ltd qualified for the financial round, the sources said.

The third bidder, Dilip Buildcon, faced disqualification due to a conflict with Clause 2.2.1 (G) of the tender, which bars entities with a record of collapse of a bridge, flyover or tunnel. Rail Vikas Nigam Ltd (RVNL) fell out of the race as its joint venture (JV) partner did not meet the technical requirements, the sources added.

With only two firms left in the fray, the Adani Group emerged as the lowest bidder with Vishwa Samudra coming second, a source privy to the development told *DH*.

The development marks a milestone for a project that has drawn political opposition and policy concerns.

Senior BJP leaders have opposed the project, especially its alignment that requires six acres of historic Lalbagh Botanical Garden.

The tunnel road, officially called the North-South underground corridor, is part of the Congress government's ambitious plans to decongest Bengaluru by building two underground roads (totalling 40 km) and 13 flyovers and elevated corridors.

The project is the brainchild of Deputy CM D K Shivakumar, who is also the Bengaluru development minister.

Mobility experts have warned that the tunnel road could undermine the metro's Phase 3A project, whose alignment runs close to the tunnel corridor.

Railways increases passenger fares slightly from Dec 26

Govt cites rising operational costs to justify hike

AJITH ATHRADY
NEW DELHI, DHNS

Train trips to get costlier

- 2 paise/km — For non-AC classes in express/mail trains
- 2 paise/km — for AC classes
- 1 paise/km — For ordinary class (travel beyond 215 km) No hike up to 215 km
- No hike for suburban services and monthly season tickets
- Rlys expects to fetch additional Rs 600 cr till Mar 31
- Second hike this fiscal

The Ministry of Railways on Sunday announced a hike in ticket fares for long-distance trains effective from December 26.

While there is no increase in fares for travel up to 215 Km in ordinary class, journeys beyond this distance in ordinary class will attract a fare hike of 1 paise per kilometre.

The decision to raise ordinary-class fares beyond a travel of 215 km was aimed at protecting short-distance and economically weaker travellers, sources in the ministry said. For non-AC classes of mail/express trains and AC classes of all trains, the hike will be 2 paise per kilometre.

Under the latest fare rationalisation, there will be no increase in fares for suburban services and monthly season tickets (MSTs), which account for the largest share of railway passengers.

In a statement, the ministry said the fare hike will fetch an additional Rs 600 crore to the railways till March 31, 2026.

Interestingly, this is the second fare hike this fiscal. The previous increase in July 2025 has generated Rs 700 crore revenue till date.

Claiming that the revision will have only a limited impact on commuters, the ministry said a passenger travelling 500 km in a non-AC coach will pay only Rs 10 extra.

The ministry noted that operational costs have risen sharply in recent years. Human resource costs have increased to Rs 1.15 lakh crore, while pension expenses now stand at Rs 60,000 crore. The total cost of operations has reached Rs 2.63 lakh crore in 2024–25.

▸ Railways, Page 3B

Students condemn the lynching of a Hindu worker in Dhaka. AFP

India tracking B'desh situation, seeks action in youth death case

NEW DELHI, DHNS: India is keeping a watch on the situation in Bangladesh and has sought punishment for the perpetrators behind the killing of a youth in the neighbouring country.

New Delhi also suspended operations of a visa facility in Bangladesh's Chittagong and clarified that "there was no attempt to breach the fence" during the protest in front of the High Commission of Bangladesh in New Delhi.

But Bangladesh rejected India's comments over the demonstration in front of the High Commission. Details on Page 8

In 3 yrs, just 25 cases on spurious drug sellers

SNEHA RAMESH
BENGALURU, DHNS

Number of cases

2023-24: 10
2024-25: 7
2025-26 (till Nov): 7

112 Total posts of drug inspectors sanctioned

104 Vacant positions

The state drugs control department has filed less than 25 cases against those selling either spurious or adulterated drugs in the last three years.

Shortage of drug inspectors is the main reason for the lack of action against offenders. In 2023-24, 10 such cases were filed and that came down to mere seven in 2024-25; and in 2025-26, only seven cases have been filed. The data was revealed in a written response to a question raised in the just concluded Assembly session.

Of the sanctioned 112 posts of drug inspectors, a miniscule eight have been filled.

Senior officials said though the number of cases filed in the court were low, other actions had been initiated against offenders. But they did not deny that a lack of inspectors was hobbling enforcement.

"The number of cases filed at the courts may be low but a large number of inspections have been conducted and action such as suspension of licenses has been taken. However, we cannot deny that absence of drug inspectors has affected enforcement," said Harsh Gupta, Principal Secretary (Health).

▸ Drug inspector, Page 3B

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Dean- Division of Interdisciplinary Science
Professor- Centre for Nano Sciences & Engineering
Indian Institute of Science

Presided by:

Dr. M.R. Jayaram

Hon'ble Chancellor, RUAS

SCAN TO KNOW MORE

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Ramaiah Technology Campus (RTC): #470-P, Peenya Industrial Area, 4th Phase, Bengaluru-560 058

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Maha Yuti on top in Maha local body polls

MUMBAI, DHNS: The BJP-led Maha Yuti alliance on Sunday swept the much-awaited Maharashtra local body polls, a result that might further demoralise the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi.

The Maha Yuti has bagged the top post in 200-plus municipal councils and town panchayats of the 288 that went to polls.

Devendra Fadnavis

The MVA alliance seems to be finding it difficult to counter saffron party's election machinery and the rift among the Opposition allies is wide open.

Details on Page 8

BOOKINGS DOWN

Jungle stays crippled as safari ban bites

AMULLYA SHIVASHANKAR
BENGALURU, DHNS

As the safari ban continues in Karnataka, jungle resorts and stays are on a survival mode despite the holiday season approaching.

Bookings remain at an all-time low as the main attraction for tourists was the safari, said property proprietors, who were reluctant to share the data on bookings. But the government made it clear that the situation is "emergency-like" and relief will come only after a careful examination.

The state government suspended the safari on November 7 after multiple incidents of human-animal conflict, especially tiger attacks, were reported in the Bandipur and Nagarahole reserves.

"Absolutely no improvement even in the holiday season, since safari is the main attraction here. A lot of people's livelihood is dependent on the businesses here," said Deepak PB, proprietor of one of the stays in the Bandipur area.

> Absolutely no improvement even in the holiday season, since safari is the main attraction here. A lot of people's livelihood is dependent on the businesses here
> **- DEEPAK PB**
> proprietor of a jungle stay in Bandipur

> We are aware that businesses there are seeking for lifting the ban on safaris but the situation is emergency-like as 20 to 30 tigers continue to roam outside
> **- ESHWAR KHANDRE**
> Forest Minister

Malik Sheikh, another owner, said the Forest Department was approached with a plea to start the safari again but there had been no update yet.

▸ Safari ban, Page 3B

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BCCC chief to conduct phone-in session today

BENGALURU, DHNS: P Rajendra Cholan, Commissioner of Bengaluru Central City Corporation (BCCC), will conduct a phone-in programme for an hour on Monday, starting at 6 pm.

Rajendra Cholan

The corporation has requested citizens to use the initiative to share civic grievances directly with the commissioner.

Complaints can include potholes, dysfunctional streetlights, lack of garbage collection, dry branches or dead trees, e-khata services, park and footpath maintenance, cleaning of drains and similar issues.

During the programme, the commissioner will speak directly to callers.

Citizens can call 080-22975803.

New BMTC metro feeder services

BENGALURU, DHNS: The Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) will introduce a new metro feeder bus service on Monday.

The MF-10B route will ply between Tin Factory and Bidarahalli via TC Palya Cross, Kittaganaru and East Point College back gate.

One bus will operate on this route daily.

The service from Tin Factory will be at 8.50 am, 10.50 am, 12.25 pm, 2 pm, 4 pm and 5.35 pm.

From Bidarahalli, the service will be at 8 am, 10 am, 11.35 am, 1.10 pm, 3.13 pm and 4.45 pm.

Last week, the BMTC introduced a new bus service between KR Market and Nithyanandanagar via Sirsi Circle, Kengeri TTMC, Kumbalgodu, Thagachaguppe and Nalku Kamba.

One bus will be deployed on the route 228D. Bus services from KR Market will be at 6.40 am, 2.40 pm, 5.45 pm and 8.45 pm.

From Kengeri TTMC, the service will be at 8.40 am, 5.30 pm, 7.55 pm, 9.30 pm, 4.25 pm and 7.10 pm, according to the BMTC.

◆ IN THE CITY ◆

GENERAL

Convocation: MS Ramaiah University of Applied Sciences; Ramaiah Medical College Auditorium, Gnanagangothri Campus, MSR Nagar; 9 am.

Book release: 'Sugunantaranga'; CM Siddaramaiah, RV Deshpande, HC Mahadevappa, Krishna Byre Gowda, BZ Zameer Ahmed Khan, Byrathi Suresh and HM Revanna to attend; Gandhi Bhavan, Kumarakrupa Road; 10 am.

CULTURAL

Bharatanatyam performance: Mithun Shyam and team; Surabharathi, HRBR Layout; 6.30 pm.

Invites to be published in this column should be sent to: **incitytoday@deccanherald.co.in.** Please note that hard copies will not be accepted

◆ CITY WEATHER ◆

FORECAST

Mist

TEMPERATURES

Maximum	27.0°C
Minimum	15.0°C
Rainfall (as of 8:30 am)	--
Humidity (as of 5:30 pm)	57%
Sunset (Dec 22)	5:58 pm
Sunrise (Dec 23)	6:37 am
Moonrise	7:37 am
Moonset	7:06 pm

(Relevant data recorded at 5.30 pm) Source: IMD

Single agency to collect bulk waste in North & East B'luru

Contractor to deploy adequate vehicles for waste collection

NAVEEN MENEZES
BENGALURU, DHNS

Bengaluru Solid Waste Management Limited (BSWML) has authorised private firm Ecosphere Waste Solutions to collect waste from bulk generators across the Bengaluru North and East city corporation limits, including cross-boundary areas, with immediate effect.

The BSWML has clarified that no other operator has been empanelled or authorised to handle bulk waste in these two corporations.

Ecosphere Waste Solutions is a subsidiary of Mukka Proteins Ltd, a company that specialises in converting organic waste into protein-rich animal feed and natural fertiliser using the Black Soldier Fly (BSF) technique.

However, the move effectively leaves bulk waste generators, such as large apartment complexes, commercial establishments, and office spaces, with no alternative service provider, even if the agency's performance falls short.

The authorised firm is expected not only to deploy an adequate fleet of vehicles for collection and transportation, but also to significantly scale up its processing capacity to handle the volume of waste generated.

In a public notice issued on December 17, BSWML stated that all bulk waste generators (BWGs) — residential, commercial, and institutional — must mandatorily engage the notified agency for the collection, transportation, processing, and disposal of waste, in compliance with the Solid Waste Management (SWM) Rules, 2016, and the SWM Bye-laws, 2020.

Bulk waste user fee was capped at Rs 12 per kg by the state government, through a notification in March. DH FILE PHOTO

The notice further warned that disposal of waste through unauthorised vendors would attract penalties under the SWM Bye-laws, environmental compensation as per the Central Pollution Control Board guidelines, and action under the Greater Bengaluru Governance Act, 2024.

According to BSWML, the empanelment followed due diligence and aligns with directions of the National Green Tribunal (NGT), particularly the implementation of the "polluter pays" principle.

Bulk waste generators are also required to pay user fees, with the state government having capped the maximum service charge at Rs 12 per kg through a notification dated March 4, 2025. In addition, bulk waste generators must file annual returns with BSWML as prescribed under the bye-laws.

The notice adds that where no other authorised waste processor is available in adjoining areas of the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA), bulk waste generators may enter into a mutually agreed legal arrangement with the notified agency. "However, unauthorised disposal will not be permitted under any circumstances," it stated.

Notably, the notice does not specify the processing capacity of the private agency or whether its existing infrastructure is adequate to handle the daily volume of waste generated.

High court stays Rameshwaram Café food probe

Grants interim protection to eatery's promoters

BENGALURU, DHNS

The Rameshwaram Café said on Sunday that the High Court of Karnataka had stayed further investigations into an FIR filed against its promoters concerning a complaint at its Bengaluru airport outlet.

Hearing a criminal petition filed by the café's founders, the court issued notices to the state government and other respondents.

The promoters — Raghavendra Rao, Divya Raghavendra Rao and senior executive Sumanth Lakshminarayan — were booked in early December at the BIAL police station for selling noxious food and criminal conspiracy, following a July incident where a customer alleged that he found a worm in his ven pongal.

The court observed that the submissions made by the promoters required detailed consideration. It granted interim protection to the promoters until the next date of hearing, the eatery said.

The petitioners argued that the allegations were false and vindictive, asserting that the complaint failed to disclose the essential ingredients of the alleged offences.

The management clarified that an inspection by the Airport Health Organisation under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare on the day of the alleged incident, along with previous FSSAI audits, had rated the outlet's hygiene and food quality as satisfactory.

The café also criticised what it termed a deliberate attempt by certain social media handles to misrepresent facts during the brand's expansion phase.

Malicious complaints and distortion of court proceedings aimed at reputational harm will face strict legal action, the statement said.

Biker dies after falling into unmarked pipeline pit in Nelamangala

BENGALURU, DHNS: A 32-year-old man died on Saturday after his motorcycle skidded into an open pipeline pit in Nelamangala on the city's outskirts.

The victim, Tabrez, a resident of Islampura, died at Nimhans two days later due to severe head injuries.

The incident occurred on December 17 near the Bajaj showroom in Subhash Nagar.

Tabrez was riding along a stretch where a pit had been excavated for water pipeline work. Nelamangala Traffic Police said the accident happened when Tabrez tried to avoid an oncoming vehicle.

"The front wheel of the motorcycle slipped into the improperly closed pit. The rider applied sudden brakes, causing the bike to skid. The victim fell onto the road," the police said.

Investigations revealed that Tabrez was not wearing a helmet at the time of the crash, worsening the impact of the fall.

The sequence of the accident was captured on nearby CCTV cameras.

Local residents and commuters expressed anger, pointing to negligence by the civic agencies involved. They said the pit was left unmarked, without barricades, reflective tape, or warning signs to alert motorists, particularly at night.

A case of accident has been registered at the Nelamangala traffic police station.

(L) Actor Suniel Shetty in conversation with cricketer KL Rahul during the 'Tiny Hearts, Mighty Battles' fundraiser in Bengaluru.

Suniel Shetty, KL Rahul support fundraiser for paediatric heart care

BENGALURU, DHNS: Rotary Bangalore Midtown GenNext, in collaboration with Bangalore East Round Table 27 (BERT27), hosted 'Tiny Hearts, Mighty Battles', a fundraiser to support life-saving paediatric heart surgeries.

The event featured a conversation between actor Suniel Shetty and cricketer KL Rahul, highlighting the need for children born with congenital heart conditions to receive timely medical care, irrespective of financial limitations.

Proceeds from the event will go towards enabling paediatric heart surgeries through The Needy Heart Foundation and Genesis Foundation, the organisers said.

Through various initiatives and fundraising efforts, Rotary Bangalore Midtown GenNext said it had helped support more than 300 children in accessing critical heart surgeries.

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Dodda Alada Mara rail crossing shut; residents stranded

ASHWIN BM
BENGALURU, DHNS

Residents of Dodda Alada Mara Road in western Bengaluru have criticised railway and civic authorities for closing a major traffic artery without providing an alternate route.

Construction of a railway underpass, which began a week ago, has left Goodearth Palmgrove Layout and nearby industrial units almost cut off.

Closure of Level Crossing 16 for the underpass has severed the road, a vital link for trucks, industry employees, and residents.

A 10-minute drive to Mysuru Road now takes up to an hour via narrow, dusty 7 to 8 km village roads during peak hours.

"We feel like we are trapped on an island," said Vinod Kumar, secretary of the Goodearth Palmgroves Homeowners' Association.

The layout has over 47 families, mostly senior citizens. "If someone is seriously unwell, an ambulance cannot reach us in time. We are living in constant fear of a medical emergency," he said.

Another resident said, "I had to call an ambulance at 2 am for my mother a week before the closure. Had it happened today, I do not know if she would have made it."

Some residents have already begun migrating to alternative homes in the city, unable to cope with the disrupted service of basic essentials and garbage collection.

Bheemanakuppe residents block access roads to the village.

While residents acknowledge the need for the underpass, they say the execution has been unplanned.

"There are more than 500 industries here. Thousands of workers must travel an extra 7 to 8 km every day. They cannot get buses on time," said Kamlesh Mehta, general secretary of the Kumbalgodu Industries Association. "Rules require a 60-foot-wide road, but the underpass is only 32 feet. Heavy vehicles will create problems for others," he said.

G Mahesh, president of Ramohalli gram panchayat, said heavy vehicles diverted into Bheemana Kuppe and Ramohalli villages have damaged roads and water pipelines. "Potholes are forming and sewage is mixing with drinking water," he said. He added that trucks have crashed into houses while turning, damaging structures and electric poles.

With the project expected to take 11 months, Kumbalagodu residents fear prolonged disruption and safety risks.

Urgent demands

Residents and the local industry association have sought immediate intervention from authorities:

- **Asphalt Bheemanakuppe Road and restrict it to light vehicles.**
- **Speed up the Challaghatta metro depot underpass to divert heavy vehicles.**
- **Station an ambulance on the affected side of the tracks and ensure a dedicated route for essential supplies.**
- **Deploy traffic police to segregate industrial and residential traffic.**

NOT TINSEL, BUT SAREES

A city church turns waste into wonder

BENGALURU, DHNS

A 25-foot eco-friendly Christmas tree made from old and torn sarees has been installed at the Primrose Mar Thoma Church, continuing its commitment to sustainable festive celebrations.

The tree has discarded sarees collected from church members and fixed onto metal wire frames of varying sizes.

The initiative seeks to spread awareness that festive decorations can be made using locally available ecofriendly material.

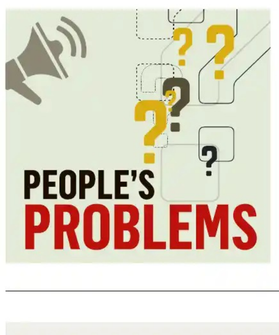
What began in 2008 as an experiment at the church has since become a tradition.

That year, plastic bottles and old tyres were used to create the Christmas tree. In subsequent years, video tapes and plastic bags in 2009, dry vegetables and grass in 2010, jacquard loom cards in 2011, newspapers in 2012, used plastic covers in 2013, soft drink bottles in 2014, and cloth scraps from tailors and garment units in 2015 were used.

The 25-foot eco-friendly X'mas tree at Primrose Mar Thoma Church.

The church has used straw and coconut shells in 2017, shredded paper from a printing unit in 2019, reject material from a furniture edge banding tape manufacturer in 2020, aluminium foil, carton boxes and newspapers in 2021, and bamboo strips in 2022.

On some occasions, the church collaborated with industries that donated waste material for the tree to reinforce the message of responsible consumption and recycling.



Need a hand? Write to us

Letters of grievances are pouring in and we are doing our best to accommodate as many as possible. Readers may write in to highlight civic problems affecting their locality and we will help address them in an interactive and effective manner.

Grievances and issues related to public utility agencies such as Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB), Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) and Bangalore Electricity Supply Company Limited (Bescom) would be highlighted in the weekly column.

The writeups, which could be accompanied by photographs highlighting the problems, will be published on Mondays. Mail your grievances to: peoplesproblems @deccanherald.co.in

Loaded trucks occupying public space

Opposite the Shell petrol bunk on South End Road, trucks loaded with construction materials are routinely parked in two or even three rows, obstructing the free movement of vehicles.

These trucks belong to an iron and steel dealer, who has effectively converted a public road into a private storage yard, barely 200 metres from the DCP's office.

Despite repeated complaints from the petrol bunk, the authorities only occasionally penalise the trucks. Such fines are insignificant compared to the enormous savings the dealer makes by avoiding legitimate yard rent and misusing public space.

This blatant disregard for parking rules and the failure of enforcement agencies to act decisively reflect the unfortunate reality today.

Multi-row parking of construction trucks chokes traffic movement.

Will a higher authority take note and intervene?
Nagaraja Manya

Traffic issues near KR Pura metro station

I wish to draw attention to the persistent traffic and accessibility issues near the main entrance of the KR Pura metro station.

The entrance area is frequently occupied by parked autos, especially during peak hours. This causes serious inconvenience to commuters accessing the metro station as well as those using the nearby flyover. The obstruction also leads to avoidable congestion for vehicles approaching from other directions.

Additionally, a large pothole at the junction opposite the metro station hampers vehicle movement and poses a safety risk to pedestrians attempting to cross the road.

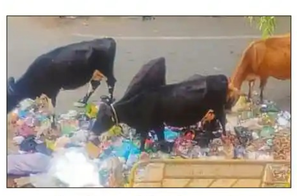
Immediate action from the authorities concerned would greatly ease commuter hardship and improve traffic flow.
Vijayababu Bharathachakravarthy
KR Puram

Metro entrance obstructed by parked autos during peak hours.

No garbage collection in Thyagarajanagar

Garbage collection has come to a complete halt in Thyagarajanagar 3rd Block (Basavanagudi/Doddaganapati wards), highlighting the inefficiency of our civic administration.

Several garbage black spots have developed near ESI Hospital and along Thyagarajanagar 3rd Block, 2nd Cross. Despite repeated assurances from officials, no sustained or meaningful action has been taken. The waste has only been partially cleared, allowing the problem to recur.



Garbage black spots near ESI Hospital and Thyagarajanagar 3rd Block.

Given the continued neglect, it appears necessary to approach the Lokayukta to inquire into the functioning of the solid waste management department in Basavanagudi.
Pralhad DG

School events causing distress

I wish to bring to your notice the distress caused by private schools conducting their annual and sports day events next to the public skating ground in Vidyaranyapura.

During weekends, residents of BEL Layout, 3rd and 4th blocks, are subjected to relentless shouting and amplified music at extremely high decibels, causing significant stress and disturbance.

I would like to raise the following concerns:

Is such excessive amplification necessary for these events? Why are public spaces being rented for private functions? What measures are being taken to instill civic sense and respect for the community? I request the authorities to take action to prevent such disturbances so that residents may enjoy peace in their neighbourhood.
Pramod Bindiganavale

The Library and Information Centre and Bhasha Sangama, English Department, at the Seshadripuram Institute of Commerce and Management (SICM), organised the National Library Week programme over four days last week. Principal Vidya Shivannavar, librarian Ravi Kumar M, all HoDs, library students coordinator and other staff attended the programme.

MARUTI SUZUKI

NEXA

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Temporary stoppage of trains

BENGALURU, DHNS: The South Western Railway (SWR) has extended the stoppage of the following trains at various stations until March 31, 2026:

Train numbers 16595/16596 KSR Bengaluru–Karwar–KSR Bengaluru Panchaganga Daily Express at Kunigal; 16239/16240 Chikkamagaluru–Yeshwantpur–Chikkamagaluru Daily Express at Sampige Road; 16228 Talguppa–Mysuru Daily Express at Malleswaram; 16315/16316 Mysuru–Thiruvananthapuram North–Mysuru Daily Express at Maddur; 66553 KSR Bengaluru–Ashokapuram MEMU at Krishnadevaraya; 16521 Bangarapet–KSR Bengaluru MEMU and 66519/66520 Marikuppam–KSR Bengaluru–Marikuppam MEMU at Devanagonthi; 17325/17326 Belagavi–Mysuru–Belagavi Vishwamanav Daily Express at Ramagiri; 17391/17392 KSR Bengaluru–Sindhanur–KSR Bengaluru Daily Express at Ramagiri and Chalgeri; 16587/16588 Yeshwantpur–Bikaner–Yeshwantpur Bi-weekly Express at Birur; 16239/16240 Chikkamagaluru–Yeshwantpur–Chikkamagaluru Daily Express at Aralaguppe; 20651/20652 KSR Bengaluru–Talguppa–KSR Bengaluru Daily Express at Arasalu and Kumsi; and 56519/56520 KSR Bengaluru–Hosapete–KSR Bengaluru Daily Passenger at Holalkere and Amritapura.

Truck rams multiple vehicles, one injured

BENGALURU, DHNS: A container truck rammed into multiple vehicles on the city outskirts on Sunday morning, injuring at least one person, police said.

"He rammed into at least 4 vehicles in Surya City, Attibele and Anekal," an officer told DH. Police caught him near Chandapura Circle after a long chase.

Public thrashed the driver in anger. He is under treatment at a hospital.

Green nod not required for tunnel project: MoEFCC

'EIA rules apply only when they are part of larger NH, SH projects'

CHIRANJEEVI KULKARNI
BENGALURU: DHNS:

The union environment ministry has said no prior environment clearance (EC) is required prior to taking up the twin tunnel project in Bengaluru, stating that such works come under the ambit of environment impact assessment (EIA) rules only when they are part of larger national or state highway projects.

Under the banner of Bengaluru Praja Vedike, activists in September moved an original application before the National Green Tribunal (NGT), questioning the state government's proposal to build a 16.74-km twin tunnel road between Hebbal and Central Silk Board junction.

The activists had contended that the project had got a push despite procedural violations and lack of "mandatory EIA" process, including public consultation, prompting NGT to issue notice to the authorities.

A view of the area at Lalbagh Botanical Garden, where the tunnel road project poses a potential threat to the 300-million-year-old rock formation and fragile ecosystem, including flora and fauna that could be impacted by the project. DH PHOTO/PUSHKAR V

Concerns

The activists had listed several reasons that make EC a prior requirement in the proposed project. The major ones include impact of the project on Lalbagh Road, pollution load in places like Peenya industrial area located within 10 km from the project site and questions over disposal of debris generated by the project.

In its response, the ministry of environment, forests and climate change (MoEF&CC) sought to differentiate between the twin tunnel project and the linear projects listed in the EIA notification, issued under Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

"(The notification) does not contain any standalone provision prescribing EC specifically for the activity of constructing an underground tunnel by itself... Tunnels as an independent category do not form part of the said Schedule," the ministry said.

Not part of highway

The ministry, however, said that underground tunnel can be subject to prior EC "only when it forms an integral part" of a project or activity expressly listed in Schedule 7(f), like a highway.

"There is no separate independent requirement of prior EC exclusively for the construction of a tunnel under the EIA notification, 2006," it said, adding that there was no question of a separate EC for the tunnel project.

Among the projects listed in 7(f) are new national highways and highway expansion with length more than 100 km.

The state-level authorities are empowered to assess state highways (SH) and SH expansions in hilly terrains or ecologically sensitive areas.

Employer has no jurisdiction to enquire into caste status of employee: HC

'Only dist caste verification committee is empowered to enquire into caste status'

BENGALURU, DHNS

The Dharwad bench of the Karnataka high court has held that an employer has no jurisdiction to enquire into the caste status of an employee. Justice M Nagaprasanna has said this while allowing the petition filed by a Fire Station Officer from Karwar.

IN THE HIGH COURT

The petitioner Raju Talwar was appointed as a Fire Station Officer under the category Other Backward Classes, as his caste at the time of appointment was notified as OBC-I. While he was posted at Karwar, on March 20, 2020, the Scheduled Tribes order was amended and Talawar caste was included as Scheduled Tribe in Entry No.38 by substituting the caste therein. On October 29, 2022, the state government removed the Talawar caste from the list of reservation under the backward class category, for it being brought under the Scheduled Tribe category.

Subsequently, the petitioner sought and was granted promotion in accordance with law on the score that he was a Scheduled Tribe. On January 29, 2025, the Regional Fire Officer issued a notice to Raju calling him for enquiry about his appointment as a candidate under Other Backward Classes, which has been since changed as Scheduled Tribe. Challenging this notice, Raju contended that his employer has no jurisdiction to enquire into the caste status as to whether it is a Scheduled Caste or a Scheduled Tribe.

The court said that the caste status of a person is to be enquired into will be only under the Karnataka Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes (Reservation of Appointments, etc.) Act, 1990. Justice Nagaprasanna noted that under the Act, the Karnataka Fire Force department is not one of those entities empowered to enquire into the caste status of any employee.

"The employer admittedly does not have the jurisdiction to enquire into the caste status of an employee. It should be by the District Caste Verification Committee only, is the settled principle of law as laid down by a plethora of judgments. On this short ground of the employer lacking jurisdiction to enquire into the caste status, the petition deserves to succeed," the court said.

Murder case: CID continues search for BJP MLA Byrathi Basavaraj

BENGALURU, DHNS

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) is continuing its search for BJP MLA Byrathi Basavaraj, who is a suspect in the murder of a rowdy sheeter earlier this year.

Sources claimed that the KR Puram MLA was in a neighbouring state awaiting the outcome of his anticipatory bail application filed before the Special Court for MP/MLAs in Bengaluru, which is expected to be heard on Monday. The court had adjourned the hearing until Monday after serving a notice on the CID, which is expected to file its objections.

Byrathi Basavaraj

Shivakumar alias Biklu Shiva, 40, a real-estate agent, was murdered near his home in Meanee Avenue Road in Bharathinagar on July 15.

In the FIR, Shivakumar's mother alleged that in 2023, he registered the General Power of Attorney (GPA) of a property in his name. In February 2025, Jagadish, Kiran and a few others trespassed on the property and issued threats to Shivakumar.

The FIR also noted that Shivakumar had previously approached the police, saying that the assailants were backed by the MLA. The complainant took a U-turn later and said that she hadn't named the MLA in her complaint.

Basavaraj has been questioned twice by the police. On July 24, the case was transferred to the CID. A total of 11 suspects were arrested, including the five who initially surrendered, claiming responsibility for the crime, before the case was handed over to the CID for further probe. The CID team made further arrests during the course of their investigation.

SANTA ON CITY RIDE

Bikers wearing Santa Claus attire take part in a bike rally ahead of the Christmas festival, in Bengaluru on Sunday. PTI PHOTO

Pregnant woman killed over inter-caste marriage

HUBBALLI, DHNS: A 20-year-old pregnant woman died at a private hospital in Hubballi on Sunday night after she was attacked with lethal weapons by her parents and relatives at Inam-Veerapur in Hubballi Rural taluk.

The deceased, Manya, was six months pregnant. Manya, a Lingayat, had married Vivekanand Doddamani of her village who belongs to Scheduled Caste community, despite opposition from her family. Fearing for their lives, the couple had moved to Haveri and were residing there. They returned to Inam Veerapur on December 8.

On Sunday, the woman's family members allegedly attempted to assault Vivekanand and his father while they were working in the agriculture field. When both managed to escape, irate trio went to their house and attacked Manya and another woman, Renavva, with lethal weapons, sources said.

A severely injured Manya was rushed to a private hospital in Hubballi. However, she did not respond to the medical treatment and breathed her last at the hospital.

Soon after the incident on Sunday, Dharwad Superintendent of Police Gunjan Arya, Hubballi-Dharwad Police Commissioner N Shashi Kumar and others visited the private hospital.

SP Gunjan Arya said three accused — Prakashgouda Patil, Veeranagouda Patil and Arunagouda Patil — have been taken into custody.

A case has been registered at the Hubballi Rural Police Station, he said.

Police book social media handles over lewd content

BENGALURU, DHNS: Central cybercrime police have booked several social media handles for allegedly sharing links and promoting lewd content.

The FIR was registered on December 16 under Section 67 of the Information Technology Act, which deals with publishing or transmitting obscene material in electronic form. As per the FIR, unknown persons have been posting such content with captions such as "Link in bio, DM For Video".

The complaint lists 28 Instagram reel links posted over the past month. A police official said an investigation is underway.

Fake website of Kollur temple: Rajasthan youth held

UDUPI, DHNS: The Kollur police have arrested a 21-year-old man from Rajasthan on the charge of creating a fake website resembling the official website of the Sri Mookambika Temple in Kollur and cheating devotees by collecting money in the name of advance room bookings.

The accused is identified as Naseer Hussain of Tijara in Alwar district, Rajasthan. Hussain was produced before the Byndoor court which remanded him in judicial custody.

KDA chief urges Somanna to act against 'anti-Kannada' rly officials

BENGALURU, DHNS: Kannada Development Authority (KDA) chairperson Purushottam Bilimale has urged Union Minister of State for Railways V Somanna to initiate disciplinary action against officials of the South Western Railway (SWR) Bengaluru division for allegedly denying candidates the opportunity to write departmental exams in Kannada.

In a letter addressed to the minister, Bilimale expressed concern over the recent recruitment and promotion exams conducted by the Bengaluru division. He noted that while the Mysuru and Hubballi divisions of SWR had permitted candidates to answer in Kannada, the Bengaluru division reportedly restricted the medium of examination, causing "deep hurt" to the sentiments of Kannadigas.

Bilimale questioned the disparity within the same railway zone, asking why a provision available in Hubballi and Mysuru was denied in the state capital. He urged the minister to order an inquiry into the matter and called for the exams held 15 days ago to be scrapped and conducted afresh. "The denial of the regional language in these exams has led to an injustice against eligible local candidates. These exams must be reconducted to ensure fairness," the letter stated.

The KDA chief further emphasised the need for a "self-regulation mechanism" within the Railways to prevent such linguistic "blunders" in the future. The controversy comes at a time when pro-Kannada groups have been increasingly vocal about the alleged imposition of Hindi and the neglect of the state's official language in central government departments operating within the city.

SAD DEMISE

Mr. K. BARKATHULLA KHAN
S/o S. A. Karim Khan
We inform with deep sadness,
Passed away on 21/12/2025.
Deeply Mourned by: Family Members

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
INSTITUTE FOR DESIGN OF ELECTRICAL MEASURING INSTRUMENTS, MUMBAI
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ऑनलाइन ONLINE
Course Date- 27,28 Dec. 3,4 Jan.2026
Email id : training@idemi.org Web : www.idemi.org Ph.: (022) 2405 0301/2/3/4
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Tender Notice No.: MW-ELM_S_8_AMC_4_AC_UNIT. Tender No.: MW-ELM_S_8_AMC_4_AC_UNIT. Tender Type: OPEN. Bidding Style: Single Rate for Tender. Cost of Tender Document (Form): ₹ 00.00. Earnest Money to be deposited: ₹ 20,300.00. Approximate Value of the Work (Tender Value): ₹ 10,16,864.00 (including all Taxes). Completion Period of the Work: 2 Years. Contract type: WORKS. Contract Category: Expenditure. Expenditure Type: Capital (WMS). Closing Date for Tender/Time: 05.01.2026. Tender Validity Period: 60 (sixty) days. Complete Details of Tender can be seen in the Railways Websites www.ireps.gov.in
AEE/WS-Planning for Dy. CEE/ERS
PR3/267
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LABORATORY FOR ELECTRO OPTICS SYSTEMS(LEOS)
इसरो ISRO LEOS Construction & Maintenance Division (LCMD)
PEENYA, BANGALORE-560058
(Phone: 080-22685086, 5047, 5094, 28392310)
CORRIGENDUM - I

Sl.No	Description	Details
1	Name of work	Contract for Washing & Pressing of leveries at LEOS Campus & New Guest House, Peenya, Bangalore-58.
2	E-Tender Notice No.	CMG/LEOS/2025-26/LMN-07 Dtd: 24.11.2025
3	Estimated cost put to tender	₹ 2.35 Lakhs
4	Period during which the tender document can be downloaded.	Extended up to 16.30 hrs on 24/12/2025
5	Last date and time for receipt of tenders	Up to 14.30 hrs. on 29/12/2025
6	Due date and time of opening of tenders	After 15.00 hrs on 29/12/2025

Interested tenderers may please refer Detailed Notice Inviting E-Tender (NIET) for eligibility criteria and other details along with Hindi version in website: www.isro.gov.in and download the tender documents from www.tenderwizard.com/ISRO.
Sd/-, Group Director, C&MG

BANGALORE WATER SUPPLY AND SEWERAGE BOARD
INVITATION FOR TENDER (Through KPP portal only)
BWSSB invites Tenders from eligible contractors for the following Works:

Office of the Chief Engineer (East), 6th Floor, Cauvery Bhavan, K. G. Road, Bangalore-09.

Sl. No.	Division	IFT Number	Amount Put to Tender / EMD Amount	Last Date & Time for submission of tender	Date & Time for opening of tender
1.	East-1	BWSSB/EE(E)-1/PB/3810/2025-26 Dt: 17.12.2025(Call-2) (Resrved for CAT-II(A))	Rs.60,26,459/- / Rs.60,300/-	29-12-2025 upto 4.00 p.m.	31-12-2025 after 5.00 p.m.
2.		BWSSB/EE(E)-1/PB/3810/2025-26 Dt: 17.12.2025(Call-2) (Resrved for CAT-II(A))	Rs.67,90,099/- / Rs.68,000/-		
			Sd/- Executive Engineer (East-1).		
3.	East-2	BWSSB/2025-26/WS/WORK_INDENT2605 Dt: 20.12.2025(Call-2)	Rs.64,27,500/- / Rs.1,28,600/-	29-12-2025 upto 4.00 p.m.	30-12-2025 at 4.00 p.m.
			Sd/- Executive Engineer (East-2).		

Office of the Chief Engineer (Project), 3rd Floor, Cauvery Bhavan, K. G. Road, Bangalore-09.

4.	Project-1	BWSSB/EE(Project)-1/AEE(P)-1-2/AE/568/2025-26 Dt: 19.12.2025	Rs.19,95,200/- / Rs.50,000/-	01-01-2026 upto 4.00 p.m.	02-01-2026 at 5.00 p.m.
			Sd/- Executive Engineer (Project-1).		

Office of the Chief Engineer (South), 7th Floor, Cauvery Bhavan, K. G. Road, Bangalore-09.

5.	South-1	BWSSB/EES-1/TO/AE/2951/2025-26 Dt: 19.12.2025 (4th Call)	Rs.4,46,081/- / Rs.11,200/-	01-01-2026 upto 4.00 p.m.	03-01-2026 after 4.00 p.m.
			Sd/- Executive Engineer (South-1).		

The details regarding the tender and participation in the e-procurement process can be obtained by logging on to https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in For further details contact the signed office during working hours. DIPR/CP/AAPL/RO4573/25-26

KARNATAKA POWER TRANSMISSION CORPORATION LIMITED
CIN: U40109KA1999SGC025521
No: CEE/Tr(Op)ZH/SEE(O)/AEE-2/FA-54& A56 /2025-26/11496-97 Date: 20.12.2025
TENDER NOTIFICATION
(THROUGH KARNATAKA PUBLIC PROCUREMENT PORTAL ONLY)
KPTCL invites bids through e-Procurement mode for the following works:
Tender No. KPTCL/2025-26/SS/WORK_INDENT3100 for Combined package of following works on PTK basis:
(1) "Providing additional 1X10MVA, 110/11kV Power Transformer at 110/11kV McGann Hospital sub-station in Shivamogga Taluk & District. Work Code-CD1120".
(2) "Providing additional 1X10MVA, 110/11kV Power Transformer at 110/11kV Gajanur sub-station in Shivamogga Taluk & District. Work Code-CD1121"
Note: 10 MVA PTR and 11kV switchgear will be supplied by KPTCL for above works.
The bids will be received through "KPP portal" mode only. The detailed notification regarding subject enquiry in the e-Tendering process can be obtained by logging on to KPTCL website https://kptcl.karnataka.gov.in with hyperlink "E Procurement KPTCL" or website https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in on or after 22-12-2025. Further details can be had from the office of the undersigned during office hours.
Sd/- Chief Engineer (Elec.,)
Transmission (Operations) Zone, KPTCL,
3rd Floor, Prasarna Bhavana, Santhepete, B.M. Road, Hassan-573 201.

GOVERNMENT OF KARANATAKA
KALYAN KARNATAKA REGION DEVELOPMENT BOARD
Opp. Aiwan-E-Shahi, Kalaburagi-585102, Karnataka
Phone No: 08472-256767 Fax No: 08472-227527, hkadbgulb@gmail.com
No. KKRDB /TECH/ 3rd party/2025-26 Date: 20.12.2025
SHORT TERM TENDER NOTIFICATION (e-Procurement System)
The Secretary, KKRDB, Kalaburagi hereby invites separate Technical and Financial Bids for "Empanelment of Third Party Consultants for Quality Assurance Audit and Control of Development works funded by KKRDB in Bellary & Vijayanagar Districts". Call-2 Through e-procurement portal of Government of Karnataka, Firms willing to participate in this tender shall necessarily register themselves with above mentioned e-procurement portal.
The tender document with detailed conditions can be obtained through web site https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in and should be submitted through e-procurement system only. EMD is Rs. 8,00,000/-, Amount put to tender Rs. 5,35,00,000/-
Event & Date : 1) Downloading of RFP from E-Portal starts from: 20-12-2025, 2) Last Date and Time for Submitting Queries: 26.12.2025 up to 5:30 pm, 3) Date and Time of Pre-Bid Meeting (Online): 29.12.2025 at 12.00pm,4) Last Date for receipt of Technical and Financial Proposals : 05.01.2026 till 4.30 pm, 5) Date of Opening of Technical Proposal: 06.01.2026 at 4.35pm, 6) Date of Opening of Financial Proposal: 07.01.2026 at 5.00pm
Sd/- Deputy Secretary
Kalyan Karnataka Region Development Board Kalaburagi
DIPR/Kalaburagi/876/KSMC&A/2025-26

Cold winds: School timings changed in Vijayapura

VIJAYAPURA, DHNS: The sharp decline in the mercury level, coupled with the cold winds, across Vijayapura has impelled the district administration to revise school timings in the interests of protecting children's health.

The order issued by Vijayapura Deputy Commissioner Dr Anand K mandates all government, aided and private schools to start classes from 10 am. The order has been issued in the wake of both the Karnataka State Natural Disaster Monitoring Centre and the India Meteorological Department forecasting cold winds across the district over the next ten days.

The district has already recorded a minimum temperature of 7 degrees Celsius and there are chances of this figure dropping further. To protect children from the adverse consequences of exposure to very cold weather, the district administration has ordered schools to start classes a little later than usual in the morning.

New BIS rules to end hospital billing woes, herald transparency

Bill must show patient's UHID, have doc's name, designation

ASHWIN B M
BENGALURU, DHNS:

In a major move to protect patients from hidden costs and confusing medical bills, the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) has introduced a new system for hospital billing. The new guidelines aim to make hospital charges transparent, easy to understand and uniform across the country.

The decision comes after a long-standing demand from citizens. A study by community platform LocalCircles found 53% of patients in India did not receive fully itemised bills.

Many were forced to pay lump-sum package charges without knowing what they were actually being billed for. Also, 74% of people surveyed wanted the government to mandate a fixed billing format to prevent overcharging.

The survey received over 35,000 responses from citizens in 329 districts. As much as 64% of the respondents were men. A total of 42% were from tier 1, about 22% from tier 2 and 36% respondents were from tier 3, 4, 5 cities and rural districts.

The standard introduces the use of Unique Health ID (UHID) on bills to facilitate better tracking of medical records. Additionally, the final bill must include names and designations of doctors involved in treatment and must be signed by an authorised signatory and the patient or his/her next of kin.

The BIS said inconsistent billing had damaged the trust between patients and healthcare providers. By standardising format, the government hopes to reduce disputes and ensure patients are charged for only services they receive.

Dr Ajith, chief medical officer of a leading hospital, told *DH* that while itemised billing was becoming the norm, compliance remained inconsistent in the city.

Itemised billing

He said NABH (National Accreditation Board for Hospitals & Healthcare Providers), an organisation under Quality Council of India, mandated itemised billing as part of its accreditation protocol.

While most corporate hospitals adhere to these transparency standards, other healthcare facilities have yet to fully implement them.

"It is good to see common citizens raise issues and finally a government body taking it from a public concern to a solution," said Sachin Taparia, founder of LocalCircles. While currently voluntary, "we are hopeful that the standard will become mandatory for all hospitals by 2027," he said.

Citizens' checklist

- Hospitals must now list expiry date & batch number for every single syringe, tablet, or bandage used
- Instead of a general 'doctor fee,' bill must show who saw you (name & specialty) and when
- It must show the exact time you checked in and out, so you aren't overcharged for extra day of room rent
- Hospitals must use readable font size (11-point minimum) and a clear table layout in the bill
- Every bill must have a UHID (digital health ID) and be printed on A4 paper, so it's easy to scan for insurance.
- It must state if hospital gave you financial counselling (explained costs to you) before starting treatment.

Bookings in jungle stays at...

Safari ban, from Page 1

The Mudumalai Tiger Reserve, situated in Tamil Nadu 15 km away from Bandipur, has become the choice of visitors hoping to have the safari experience.

"While some of us are waiting for the Karnataka government to lift the suspension, a few businesses have shifted to the Mudumalai forest. Tourists are also visiting there as the main attraction is the safari," said Santosh Kumar, a property owner.

Property managers further said that a lot of visitors, who came in without checking, were sent to Mudumalai were disappointed as people said that Bandipur has better sightings.

"Shifting to Mudumalai is not an option as there are already many stays in and around. We have also reduced the prices of room tariffs. From Rs 14,000 to Rs 10,000, but we are still not getting bookings," another owner said. The owner of a jungle resort in Nagarahole, wishing to remain anonymous, said: "We urge the forest minister to withdraw the ban. If the situation continues, we will not be able to run the business for a long time."

What minister says

Minister of Forests, Ecology and Environment Eshwar Khandre told *DH*: "We are aware that businesses there are seeking for lifting the ban on safaris but the situation is emergency-like as 20 to 30 tigers continue to roam outside."

He noted that the general perception is that the vehicular movement has provoked the attacks.

"The safety of people is our topmost priority, so the further decision will be taken after examining the situation carefully," he added.

Railways increases passenger fares slightly...

Railways, from Page 1

The statement further said the railways has expanded its network and operations significantly over the last decade. To cater to a higher level of operations and to improve safety, it is increasing its manpower. To meet this higher cost of manpower, the railways is focusing on higher cargo loading and a small amount of passenger fare rationalisation.

The railways will continue to strive for more efficiency and containing cost to meet its social goals, the statement further said.

Unethical alliance of corporates, communalists causing all problems: CPI(M) leader

BENGALURU, DHNS

Communist Party of India (Marxist) polit bureau member U Vasuki said on Sunday that the "unethical alliance" between corporates and communalists was the root cause of all problems in the country.

"We need to sharpen our weapons, but these are not knives or sickles. The idea to resist exploitation is a weapon. Idea to challenge status quo and claim our own rights and dignity is a weapon," she said, speaking during the state-level Janadhani rally organised by CPI(M) Karnataka state committee that saw attendance of masses from across the state.

She slammed the Modi-led NDA government for replacing Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) with Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Act.

"Right from its inception, the Modi government is destroying Rural Employment Act, and this is the last nail in the coffin. They are using Lord Ram's name to sell their bogus product. For Sangh Parivar, Ram's name is the Unique Selling Point (USP). By latest changes, the basic point of guarantee in the Act is taken away."

Slamming Bihar Chief Minister and JD(U) supremo Nitish Kumar for pulling a lady doctor's Hijab recently, Vasuki explained it contained the idea of inequality, adding that the views of BJP's allies about women and minorities had been "exposed."

CPI(M) leader K Neela said the BJP had proved it was "anti-women" by removing the MGNREGA scheme - a lifeblood to rural women.

The CPI(M) sent a memorandum to the state government comprising 20 demands, including opposition to the VB-G RAM G Bill, a demand seeking a minimum wage of Rs 36,000 to contract workers in government and private sectors and gram panchayats, opposing the privatisation of services like electricity, transport, water, road and the "assault" on federalism.

It urged the government to fight communalism, provide land rights to Dalits and follow the 'Kerala model' to strengthen public education.

In 3 years, just 25 cases on spurious drug sellers

Drug inspector, from Page 1

In 2021, the Karnataka public services commission had published a list of selected candidates for the post. However, the selection was challenged; eventually, a special leave petition was filed in the Supreme Court. Owing to the legal battle, 104 posts of drug inspectors have remained vacant for nearly four years now.

Drug inspectors play a crucial role in quality check and enforcement of the norms. Senior officials from the department admitted that peddling of spurious and adulterated drugs is rampant in the state, but said their hands were tied due to legal complications.

"We have handed over the responsibilities of conducting inspections and checking for spurious drugs to the assistant drug controllers. However, a lack of inspectors is a problem. The rules do not allow us to hire them on a contractual basis and hence we are awaiting the Supreme Court orders to proceed," a senior official said.

Recently, the department also introduced an amendment to the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, which aims to curb the peddling of sub-standard and adulterated drugs. The need for an amendment and stricter law points to the extent of the problem in the state.

The department, through the amendment, has made all offences punishable under this legislation cognisable and non-bailable.

Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao, while introducing the amendment, had said that the bill aimed to curb racketeering in poor and duplicate drugs.

Woman killed in leopard attack

TURUVEKERE (TUMAKURU DISTRICT), DHNS: A 35-year-old woman was killed in leopard attack at Aremallenahalli of Dabbeghatta hobli in Turuvekere taluk on Sunday evening. The deceased has been identified as Sujatha.

Sujatha had come to her land for driving her cattle and sheep back to the house on Sunday evening at which time a leopard attacked a sheep. As she tried to rescue the sheep, the leopard pounced on her and and she was injured severely in the neck. Sujatha died at the spot due to profuse bleeding. Since Sujatha did not return home even after dark fell, her husband Bhyregowda came looking for her and found her dead. Locals urged forest department to trap the leopard at the earliest.

Aeronautical Development Agency
(Ministry of Defence, Govt. of India)
PB No. 1718, Vimanapura Post, Bangalore-560017

Advt. Reference No. ADA: ADV-135:2025 — 19-12-2025

Recruitment of 'Project Scientists' on Programme Based Limited Tenure Contract Appointment

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Sl. No.	Name of the Post	Upper Age Limit	Minimum No. of years of Experience Essential	Gross Emoluments per month at Current rates (Rs.)	No. of Post(s)
1.	Project Scientist 'E'	50 Years	10 - 15 Years	2,01,794/-	01
2.	Project Scientist 'D'	45 Years	7 -10 Years	1,24,612/-	02
3.	Project Scientist 'C'	40 Years	3 - 7 Years	1,08,073/-	02

2. This advertisement is purely indicative in nature. For more information pertaining to crucial date eligibility criteria, minimum required essential qualification, experience and other important instructions, please read detailed advertisement which will be available on ADA's official website ***www.ada.gov.in*** under "Recruitment" option in Menu. For registration and submission of online application, please log on to ADA website. It is requested to go through the detailed advertisement carefully before filling up the online application.

Detailed advertisement will be available on ADA's official website ***www.ada.gov.in***

Online link for registration and applying will be active (tentatively) from 22nd December 2025, 1000 hrs on ADA website

All interested candidates are requested to follow the website for updates.

Director (Admin & HR), ADA

Aeronautical Development Agency
(Ministry of Defence, Govt. of India)
PB No. 1718, Vimanapura Post, Bangalore-560017

Advt. Reference No. ADA: ADV-136:2025 — 19-12-2025

RECRUITMENT: PROGRAMME BASED MANPOWER ON LIMITED TENURE CONTRACT APPOINTMENT

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Sl. No.	Name of the Post	Upper Age Limit	Minimum No. of years of Experience Essential	Gross Emoluments per month at Current rates (Rs.)	No. of Post(s)
1.	Project Admin Assistant (PAA)	35 Years	03 Years	35,220/-	13
2.	Project Senior Admin Assistant (PSAA)	45 Years	06 Years	47,496/-	10
3.	Project Admin Officer (PAO)	50 Years	10 Years	59,276/-	05
4.	Project Technical Assistant (PTA)	35 Years	03 Years	35,220/-	10
5.	Project Senior Technical Assistant (PSTA)	45 Years	07 Years	50,224/-	05

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Detailed advertisement will be available on ADA's official website ***www.ada.gov.in***

Online link for registration and applying will be active (tentatively) from29th December 2025, 1000 hrs on ADA website

All interested candidates are requested to follow the website for updates.

Director (Admin & HR), ADA

Gruha Lakshmi: Money transfer from today

BELAGAVI, DHNS: Minister for Women and Child Development Laxmi Hebbalkar said here on Sunday that the finance department had approved the allocation of funds for the 24th instalment of the Gruha Lakshmi scheme, and the department would start crediting money to the beneficiaries. accounts starting Monday, and complete the process by Saturday.

Laxmi told reporters that she knew nothing about a possible change in leadership in the state, nor about a possible Cabinet rejig. "We are bound by whatever the high command decides on these issues," said the minister.

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Shivakumar says he and CM 'working like brothers'

Claims to have 'made' Rajanna Apex bank chief in past

BENGALURU, DHNS

Amid his ongoing power struggle with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar on Sunday played down the differences, stating that he and the chief minister were "working like brothers".

"Aren't CM and I not working like brothers? I don't have any difference with any Congress leader. Have I had any difference with the CM since he came to the party 16 (19) years ago? It is all a creation of the media and Opposition parties. All Congress leaders are working together. We are all friends and colleagues," Shivakumar told reporters.

On his meeting with former minister K N Rajanna, a Siddaramaiah loyalist, the KPCC president said the veteran was close to him also, adding that he had "made" Rajanna the president of Apex Bank during the chief ministership of S M Krishna.

"Rajanna is an MLA of our party and was a minister. It was a courtesy call. I could not talk to him properly yesterday and hence met him today," he noted.

These comments assume importance as they come close on the heels of Rajanna's comments during the just-concluded winter session of the legislature in Belagavi, where he had claimed that he wouldn't become a minister if Shivakumar were to become the CM.

When asked about senior Congressman V R Sudarshan's letter to AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge demanding that the "confusion" in the party be cleared, he said, "There is no confusion in the party according to me. It is all a creation of BJP and the media. BJP is trying to cover up its own internal mess".

When asked about his proposed visit to Delhi, the DCM said he was going for a meeting on the river-linking project.

"I will also demand for 50% grants for metro and other infrastructure projects in Bengaluru. A grant of 12-13% won't be enough. We are taking up the double decker project and need to discuss the Hosakote and Bidadi lines of the Metro too," said Shivakumar, who is also the Bengaluru development minister.

D K SHIVAKUMAR
Deputy Chief Minister

"I will also demand for 50% grants for metro and other infrastructure projects in Bengaluru. A grant of 12-13% won't be enough. We are taking up the double decker project and need to discuss the Hosakote and Bidadi lines of the Metro too.

K'taka politics: Confusion at state level, says Kharge

All India Congress Committee (AICC) president Mallikarjun Kharge has said that high command has not created any confusion in the state politics.

"The confusion is at the local level and the local leaders should find a solution. It is not right to point fingers at the high command for everything," he said. Kharge was speaking to reporters in Kalaburagi on Sunday.

Kharge said that Congress is not a party built by an individual. "It is built by all workers. No single person should claim credit for organising the party. Stop boasting about personal contribution," he said.

Rajanna reaffirms loyalty to CM

Former Minister K N Rajanna reaffirmed his loyalty to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, noting that no matter what Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar says, "there's no change in his stand."

Speaking to reporters, he said: "I stand by whatever I have said on this (power tussle) earlier. Siddaramaiah is repeatedly reiterating that high command's decision is final. So, there are no differences on this".

Speaking about his meeting with Shivakumar, he said the DCM hadn't come searching for him. "He's the party (state) president. He can speak and discuss with anyone. He said we should organise the party, I said yes".

New rural job scheme is transparent & progressive, says Pralhad Joshi

MGNREG scheme failed to create durable assets, says union minister

HUBBALLI, DHNS

Defending the Centre's move to replace Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) with Viksit Bharat – Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Act, Union Minister Pralhad Joshi said the new scheme was more transparent and effective and would eliminate corruption.

Joshi told reporters here on Sunday that the Congress had been spreading lies about the Bill (which has now become a law) and misleading people.

President Droupadi Murmu on Sunday gave assent to VB-G RAM G Bill. The Act enhances statutory wage employment guarantee to 125 days per year for rural households.

Joshi said the new bill (Act) increases guaranteed wage employment for unskilled labourers from 100 to 125 days a year and allows labourers to work in fields in peak agriculture season. "It has stronger accountability and robust transparency mechanisms, reducing leakages and misuse of funds," he said.

Real-time digital tracking, geotagged assets and direct benefit transfers have been included, Joshi said.

"The MGNREGA failed to create durable assets and was marred by corruption. I had exposed a scam under it in Dharwad district and had written to CM Siddaramaiah, but no action was taken. Under the new Act, there is no scope for corruption," he said.

Does name change serve any purpose, questions Kharge

KALABURAGI, DHNS: Taking potshots at the Union government over dropping Mahatma Gandhi's name from MGNREG scheme, AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge sought to know "Why did the union government drop Mahatma Gandhi's name from rural employment scheme? What did the Centre achieve by replacing MGNREGS with VB-G RAM G?"

Mallikarjun Kharge

Speaking to reporters in Kalaburagi on Sunday, Kharge said, "The Congress-led UPA government had adopted a rights-based approach for the welfare and development of the poor. It had implemented Right to Food Security, Right to Education and Right to Livelihood through MGNREG scheme. The Modi-led NDA government is weakening or revoking the welfare schemes brought in by UPA government one by one," he charged.

"The NDA government at the Centre lacks vision. They don't have schemes that would help in nation building. They dropped the planning commission and instead came up with the NITI Aayog, which lacks both Niti and planning. It's just a name change, nothing more," the leader of the Opposition in Rajya Sabha said.

DH Classifieds »

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ETCHED IN FLOWERS

Floral replicas on display at "Maagi Utsava" (winter festival) being held on the palace premises in Mysuru on Sunday. DH PHOTO/ANUP RAGH T

Soon, midday meals for pre-primary, PU students too

SHIVAMOGGA, DHNS: School Education and Literacy Minister Madhu Bangarappa said on Sunday that the mid-day meals scheme would be extended to children in pre-primary (LKG & UKG) classes and PU students.

This was aimed at addressing malnutrition and encouraging learning among students, he told a press conference here.

"The children in these classes in both government and aided institutions will also get free notebooks, textbooks, shoes, socks, milk and eggs. This will result in additional expenditure of Rs 200 crore by the government," the minister said.

Music and physical education teachers would be appointed to all Karnataka public schools and schools to be established in future, Madhu said, adding that school bands would be mandatory henceforth in government institutions.

It was decided at the just-concluded legislature session to appeal against the order of the Supreme Court to make passing of the teacher eligibility test compulsory for even those in service, the minister said.

A government order had also been issued in this regard, he added. Madhu made it clear that there was no shortage of funds for bringing schools under government grant and for recruitment of teachers in government schools.

Polio vax drive begins, goes door to door today

BENGALURU, DHNS

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah inaugurated the statewide polio vaccination drive on Sunday, administering drops to children under five at his official residence.

Speaking on the occasion, Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao said polio drops were completely safe and urged parents to get their kids vaccinated.

"These two drops are extremely important. Every child must get them without fail," he said. The door-to-door campaign is from Dec 22 to 24.

"The target is 62,40,114 children, achieving 100% coverage," said Rao. In the state, 33,258 booths, 1,030 mobile teams, 1,096 transit teams, 1,13,115 vaccination workers and 7,322 supervisors have been deployed.

The government has also launched 'Nearby Vaccination Centre Karnataka' app for parents to locate nearest centre. In Bengaluru, commissioners of the 5 corporations inaugurated the drive in their respective jurisdictions.

Polio vaccination was carried out through booths set up in urban primary health centres, schools, Namma Clinics and anganwadi centres in the city.

Mobile teams have been deployed at bus stands, metro stations and other high-footfall locations. At vaccination centres in the city, many parents were pleased with the quick assisted service.

"We finished the process in just five minutes for our child," said Parvathi Arun of Nayandahalli. Kishan Sampath of Hosakerehalli praised the GBA website that helps locate nearest centre.

On Day One, 10,77,134 children were vaccinated under GBA limits, achieving 95% of the target.

The West Corporation recorded highest vaccinations, with 2,39,079 children under 5 years of age.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao inaugurate polio vaccination by administering it to a child in Bengaluru on Sunday.

Assault on kid with special needs: School head, wife among four arrested

Couple thrashed boy with belt, plastic pipe, threw chilli powder on him

BAGALKOT, DHNS

Police, on Sunday, arrested four people on charges of assaulting a boy with special needs at a residential school at Navanagar here. They were later produced before the judge, who remanded them in judicial custody.

The arrested include Akshay Indolkar, head and teacher at Divyajyothi residential school for children with special needs, his wife Malini, Ravi and Vishal. The victim's father had filed a police complaint in this regard.

It is said that Akshay had thrashed the boy, Deepak Rathod (16) black and blue using a belt, plastic pipe, while Malini threw chilli powder on him. A video of the incident, which reportedly occurred two months ago, has gone viral on social media, attracting widespread criticism.

The video shows the boy crying, but none of the other teachers present there coming to his rescue. The victim had suffered bruises as a result of the thrashing.

On Sunday morning, deputy superintendent of police Gajanana Sutar brought the suspects to the school premises, conducted mahazar and took the items used to assault the boy into their custody.

The authorities handed over most of the children in the school (out of a total of 49) to their parents on Sunday, while three others will be sent home with their families on Monday, Prabhakar, deputy director of the women and child development department, told reporters. Earlier, principal civil judge Murugendra Tubaki of the judicial magistrate first class court visited the school and conducted an inspection.

He took details of the incident from the police and district welfare officer for the specially abled Girija Patil. MLC P H Poojar, who visited the school, told reporters that he would speak to the minister concerned on taking strict action against the suspects.

Minister promises stern action

The government will initiate criminal proceedings against those who physically assaulted a specially abled boy at the school, Woman and Child Welfare Minister Laxmi Hebbalkar told reporters on Sunday, reports DHNS from in Belagavi.

Laxmi said, "We deem it a crime when a strong and healthy kid is assaulted, and take action accordingly. Such being the case, there is no question of letting those who have assaulted a kid with special needs go unpunished".

The minister pointed out that the institution in question had come up without the government's permission.

"Such incidents also reflect poorly on us. No sooner had I learnt of this incident than I directed the local authorities to go to the school. I have spoken to the Bagalkot DC about shutting the school down," she said.

One roof for all: From huts of isolation to homes of resolve

Quiet revolution against menstruation taboos helps Madia women reclaim dignity

MRITYUNJAY BOSE
GADCHIROLI, DHNS

A quiet change is unfolding in Maharashtra's tribal heartland of Gadchiroli.

In Sitatola village, near the district headquarters, women of the Madia community have come together to dismantle the age-old practice of 'kurma-ghars' (menstruation huts) and to build for themselves what they call 'mava askan lon', their "rightful home as women".

For generations, menstruating women were banished to these cramped, makeshift huts, stripped of dignity and basic facilities. Isolated from the community, they survived on food and water left at a distance, forbidden from working, studying, or even moving freely. The huts were unhygienic, unsafe, and in some cases, fatal.

By reclaiming space and solidarity, these women are rewriting tradition—slowly, but with unmistakable resolve.

"A change is needed... in fact, it is shocking that such practices continue even today. We have started in a small way to educate and inform people, and the response has been good," said Dr Sachin Madavi, Assistant Commissioner of the Social Justice & Special Assistance Department in Gadchiroli district.

Madavi, himself from the Madia community, is pushing hard at the government level to end the practice. His wife, Dr Priyanka Shedmake, a gynaecologist, is working on the ground, educating women about the need for change.

THEN & NOW: From menstruation huts to 'mava askan lon' – rightful home as women. DH PHOTO

In fact, Dr Dilip Barsagade, president of the Society of People's Action in Rural Services and Health (SPARSH), was among the first to raise the alarm over kurma-ghars. As early as 2013, he wrote to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), which in turn expressed concern over the practice.

"Our volunteers are visiting villages and explaining to people the importance of proper facilities for women during menstruation. More importantly, we are clear that a rightful home must be built through shram-daan," said Barsagade. He added that the structures now coming up in villages are proper concrete homes, complete with a room, kitchen and toilet facilities.

Local volunteer Shubhanga Duga said the response from women has been encouraging. Volunteers such as Chetana Madavi and Papita Kumbhre are working tirelessly to ensure the practice comes to an end.

"We have to stay in the kurma-ghar... there is no option for us. More than women, the village elders and the menfolk too need to be convinced," said a girl, who was on her period. "While there is support from family, what women truly need is community support," she added.

"Menstruation is a difficult time for women, especially young girls who require care. Heavy blood loss often leads to exhaustion," said Dr Madavi.

"There was a case of a woman who died from excessive blood loss in Bhamragad. In another instance, a young girl was carried away by a wild animal. There have also been cases of snake bites, and of girls and women facing harassment while living in gaokors," said Dr Barsagade.

"Sitatola village was our pilot project. This initiative has taken shape through shram-daan," he added.

Sabarimala airport: HC halts land acquisition process

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DHNS: The Kerala High Court has set aside crucial stages of the land acquisition process for the proposed Sabarimala greenfield airport, holding that the state failed to properly assess the minimum land required for the project.

Considering the petition of Ayana Charitable Trust, a single bench of Justice C Jayachandran ordered on December 19 that a fresh social impact assessment (SIA) should be carried out, as the initial SIA violated the norms that only the bare minimum land required for a project should be acquired.

The Kerala government was going ahead with the acquisition of 2,570 acres of land, which comprised 2,263 acres of the Cheruvally estate, which was in the possession of the Ayana Charitable Trust and 307 acres from adjacent areas.

The HC order is a political setback for the CPM government, as it has been highlighting the proposed Sabarimala airport as one of the major infrastructure projects.

The land acquisition for the project was earlier caught up in legal issues as the state government had raised objections against the sale of the Cheruvally estate by Harrison Malayalam Plantation to the Gospel for Asia, founded by K P Yohannan.

'Purified poll rolls' are must for healthy democracy: CEC

HYDERABAD, PTI: Stressing the need for "purification of electoral rolls" from time to time, Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar on Sunday said only Indian citizens should be in the voters' list.

Gyanesh Kumar

Addressing the Booth Level Officers (BLOs) of Telangana here, he said India is the world's largest democracy.

The BLOs formed the backbone of India's electoral system and the success of electoral roll purification depended on their diligence and integrity.

He noted that the global community closely watched India's elections to understand how the world's largest democracy functioned.

He said during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, the BLOs of Bihar had shown the way to the country. Under the phase-III of SIR, Telangana would demonstrate to the entire country how the exercise should be conducted.

On the SIR undertaken by the EC in Bihar, he said the exercise had been carried out flawlessly.

The list of deleted electors in Bihar included 22 lakh who had passed away, 36 lakh who had (permanently) shifted, and seven lakh fake voters.

There were 7.5 crore electors in the final list, he said, adding the process recorded zero complaints, zero re-polling and zero recounting, and congratulated Bihar's BLOs for doing a good job. "From time to time, electoral rolls have to be purified. SIR will also be undertaken in Telangana. Prepare such an electoral roll which has names of only those who are elgibile. This is your work and it is very important for democracy. Purified electoral rolls are essential for a healthy democracy," Kumar said.

The voter list purification exercise was completed in Bihar and the drive is going on in 12 states, he said.

"Only Indian citizens should be part of the voters' list. Should an outsider be in the voter list? Be it of any religion...they should be Indian," he said.

Govt denies Aravalli mining push charge

Cites Supreme Court freeze and 90% protection

NEW DELHI, PTI

Asserting that 90% of the Aravalli region will remain "protected", the Centre on Sunday rejected claims that the new definition of the Aravalli range will allow large-scale mining and cited a Supreme Court-ordered freeze on new mining leases in the region.

It said a Supreme Court-approved framework provides for stronger protection of the mountain system and places a freeze on new mining leases until a comprehensive management plan is finalised.

Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav said that the SC-approved definition will bring more than 90% of the Aravalli region under "protected area."

Replying to queries from mediapersons after a meeting on Project Elephant and the National Tiger Conservation Authority in the Sundarbans of WB, Yadav also emphasised that "no relaxation has been granted" with regard to the protection of the Aravalli region and claimed "lies" have been spread on the issue.

"Stop spreading misinformation!" he said in a post on X, amid allegations by the Congress and others that the step will destroy the Aravallis.

"In the total area of 1.44 lakh square kilometres of the Aravalli, mining eligibility can only be in 0.19% of the area. The rest of the entire Aravalli is preserved and protected," said Yadav, the Union minister for environment, forest and climate change.

The apex court on November 20 accepted the recommendations of a committee under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change on the definition of Aravalli Hills and Ranges.

A member of 'Aravalli Bachao Sanstha' during a demonstration near the residence of Haryana minister Rao Narbir Singh in Gurugram. PTI

According to the new definition, "Aravalli Hill is any landform in designated Aravalli districts with an elevation of 100 metres or more above its local relief" and an "Aravalli Range is a collection of two or more such hills within 500 metres of each other".

The government, however, asserted that it is "incorrect to conclude" that all landforms below 100 metres are open for mining.

In an explanation issued amid the row over the "100-metre" criterion, the government rejected claims that mining had been permitted in areas below 100 metres and said the restriction applies to entire hill systems and their enclosed landforms, not merely to the hill peak or slope.

It said the definition of the Aravalli hills and range has been standardised across states on SC's directions to remove ambiguity and prevent misuse, particularly practices that allowed mining to continue dangerously close to hill bases.

Snow ushers in 'Chillai Kalan', revives J&K tourism hopes

SRINAGAR, DHNS: Intermittent rainfall in the plains and snowfall in the higher reaches continued across Kashmir on Sunday, ushering in "Chillai Kalan"—the Valley's 40-day harshest winter phase—ending a nearly two-month dry spell.

The change in weather disrupted air traffic, with at least 15 flights cancelled at Srinagar International Airport. An Airport Authority of India (AAI) official said snowfall in the upper reaches and rainfall in the plains reduced visibility, forcing cancellations and delays.

Airport authorities warned that flight disruptions could continue as adverse weather conditions prevailed across several parts of North India, with delays, rescheduling, and cancellations likely.

On the ground, the season's first snowfall transformed higher-altitude tourist destinations, with Gulmarg and Sonamarg receiving fresh snow. The sight of snow-clad slopes revived hopes of a strong winter tourist rush ahead of Christmas and New Year celebrations, after weeks of anxiety among hoteliers and tour operators.

"This snowfall is a game-changer for winter tourism," said Athar, a tour operator. "If it continues for the next few days, we expect a surge in visitors, especially skiers and holidaymakers."

Beyond tourism, the precipitation brought wider ecological and economic benefits. Rain and snow washed away accumulated dust and suspended particulate matter, leading to a sharp improvement in air quality.

COLD REALITY

A child sits near a makeshift stove to stay warm on a winter morning in New Delhi on Sunday. More than 105 flights were cancelled and over 450 services delayed due to low-visibility conditions amid fog at the Delhi airport. PTI

Hunt launched after terrorists knock for food in Udhampur

ZULFIKAR MAJID
SRINAGAR, DHNS

A demand for food reportedly by three suspected Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) terrorists at a nomadic Bakerwal family's home in Udhampur's Majalta area has blown the cover on militant movement deep inside Jammu's forest belt, triggering a massive, multi-agency hunt across the region.

The terrorists reportedly entered the house of Mangtu Ram in Chore Motu village around 6.30 pm on Saturday, took food and fled into the surrounding forests. Villagers immediately alerted security forces, who moved in swiftly, sealing escape routes and launching an intensive cordon-and-search operation.

The incident comes amid heightened counter-insurgency operations in Udhampur, where recently infiltrated militants have been using dense forests as transit corridors and fortified hideouts. Earlier last week, the same group was tracked to a forest hideout in the Jofar area, prompting a sustained search operation.

A few kilometres away, an encounter broke out on Monday evening between security forces and JeM terrorists in Jofar, during which a police officer sustained critical gunshot injuries and later succumbed.

Security officials said Pakistani terrorists, armed with modern assault rifles, communication equipment and winter survival gear, have increasingly turned Jammu and Kashmir's dense forests into fortified safe havens. The rugged terrain, thick foliage and limited road connectivity allow militants to hide, regroup and ambush security forces while avoiding detection.

With heavy snowfall reported in the upper reaches of Jammu and Kashmir since Saturday evening, officials said seasonal movement towards lower altitudes has intensified. "This includes civilians as well as infiltrated terrorists seeking shelter, food and cover," an official said, adding that the Army has stepped up surveillance, domination patrols and search operations across forest belts in Udhampur, Kathua, Rajouri and Poonch.

Security forces said operations will continue until the terrorists are neutralised, while residents have been urged to remain alert and report any suspicious movement immediately.

Kerala mob lynching: Kin seek Rs 25L compensation

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DHNS: The family of a Chhattisgarh native, a victim of an alleged mob lynching incident in Kerala's Walayar, has demanded compensation of Rs 25 lakh, besides an investigation under stringent provisions of the law, including the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.

Ram Narayan Baghel (31) was killed on December 18 after being attacked in Walayar by a gang who mistook him for a thief.

Some accused also allegedly asked him whether he was from Bangladesh. The brutality of the attack came to light after a post-mortem examination revealed that there were 30 injuries on his body.

Baghel's brother said that the state government should provide a compensation of Rs 25 lakh to the family as Baghel was the lone earning member.

A cobra, then a krait: How two brothers murdered their father for insurance money

CHENNAI, DHNS: What was thought to be an accidental snake bite death has now turned out to be a cold-blooded murder of a lab assistant at a government school in Tiruvallur district. The diabolical murder plot was hatched by his two sons to claim insurance payouts of Rs 3 crore.

The brothers, Mohanraj and Hariharan, with the help of four others, brought a venomous krait snake to their house in Podathurpet town on October 22 and made it bite their father after an earlier attempt to kill him using a cobra failed.

On December 19, police arrested Mohanraj, Hariharan and their accomplices, Balaji, Prasanth, Dinakaran, and Naveen Kumar, for the murder.

E P Ganesan, who worked at the Government Boys' Higher Secondary School in Podathurpet in Tiruvallur district, died on October 22, allegedly due to a snake bite. His son Mohanraj filed a complaint with the Podathurpet police seeking registration of a case under Section 194 of BNSS to claim the insurance money.

Ganesan, who had suffered serious injuries in an accident six months ago, is believed to have told his sons that they will get insurance proceedings of Rs 3 crore even if he dies. His children decided to get rid of him for the money and are believed to have paid Rs 1.5 lakh to their accomplices.

Police initially treated the case as a snake bite until an insurance company filed a complaint with Inspector General of Police (North Zone) Asra Garg, raising suspicion about the claims made by the brothers. The suspicion arose because the family had subscribed to several high-value insurance policies disproportionate to its known income sources, besides availing multiple loans from various lenders.

When the case seemed far more than a simple snake bite, Garg formed an eight-member Special Investigation Team (SIT), which uncovered that his own sons had hatched the plot for the insurance money.

PM Modi pays tributes to Assam Agitation martyrs

GUWAHATI, DHNS: A day after accusing the Congress of trying to "protect infiltrators", Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday visited the memorial of the martyrs of the Assam Agitation—an anti-foreigner movement that rocked the state between 1979 and 1985.

The PM visited the memorial at Boragaon paid floral tributes at the entrance, and garlanded the statue of Khargeswar Talukdar — the first martyr of the Assam Agitation.

The memorial was opened on December 10 to commemorate the 860 indigenous people who died during the movement. "The sacrifices made during the Assam movement are an integral part of Assam's identity and collective memory. We remain resolute in our commitment to working tirelessly for Assam's progress, prosperity and cultural pride," Modi posted on X.

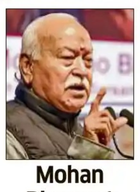
Modi's visit is significant as the ruling BJP is once again banking on Assam's decades-old issue of "illegal migration" from Bangladesh to corner the Opposition ahead of the Assembly polls in March-April. The BJP considers Bengali-speaking Muslims "foreigners" and a threat to Assam's identity and culture.

Attack on Opposition

On Sunday, Modi again accused the Congress of having no concern for Assam, its people, and their identity, and helping "illegal infiltrators" settle down for vote-bank politics.

Trying to understand RSS through BJP's lens is a huge mistake: Mohan Bhagwat

ANIRBAN BHAUMIK
KOLKATA, DHNS



Mohan Bhagwat

If all Hindus stand together, it will not take time to change the situation in West Bengal, said Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat in Kolkata on Sunday, before quickly adding that his organisation focuses on social, not political, change.

He said attempts to understand the RSS through the lens of the BJP were a huge mistake. The RSS chief also said Hindus around the world, including those in India, would have to help the community in Bangladesh save themselves from persecution. He was speaking at an event held in Kolkata on the occasion of the RSS' 100th anniversary.

"It is for the government to decide who it will allow to cross over to India from Bangladesh. There has to be a control on who is allowed to come," said Bhagwat in response to a query from West Bengal Leader of Opposition and state BJP heavyweight Suvendu Adhikari on the links between illegal migration and the rising radicalism in West Bengal.

The RSS chief also commented on the atrocities against Hindus in Bangladesh.

"They are a minority there, and the situation is quite difficult. Even though it's difficult, for maximum protection, the Hindus there will have to stay united. And Hindus all over the world must help them. We must help them as much as we can, within our limits. We have to do everything we can, and we are doing it," he said.

India's protest against the persecution of Hindus and other minority communities in Bangladesh after the change of government in the neighbouring country added to strains in ties between New Delhi and the interim government in Dhaka.

Bhagwat said that the only country for Hindus was India: "The government of India will have to take cognisance of this. They will have to do something. They might already be doing something. Some things are disclosed, some cannot be. Sometimes there are results, sometimes there aren't. But something has to be done."

VISUAL TREAT

Artefacts from oldest Iron Age site to adorn Porunai Museum

E T B SIVAPRIYAN
CHENNAI, DHNS

Iron implements from Sivakalai, which pushed back the introduction of smelted iron in India by over a millennium, along with urns, skulls, and offering potteries from nearby Adichanallur, are among thousands of artefacts that will adorn the Porunai (Thamirabarani River Civilisation) Museum in Tirunelveli, which Chief Minister M K Stalin inaugurated on Saturday.

Built for Rs 33 crore, this is the second major museum to open under the DMK government, following the one at Keeladi, a Sangam-Era site near Madurai, in 2023.

Spanning 54,296 square feet across six blocks, including an administrative building with a conference hall and an audio-visual (AV) hall, the museum will enthral visitors.

Showcasing the lives of ancient Tamils, it features two blocks each for artefacts from Sivakalai and Adichanallur, plus Korkai, the celebrated port of the famed Pandya Kingdom.

Sivakalai put itself on the world map in January when the Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology (TNSDA) announced that carbon dating of artefacts from the site showed iron usage dates back 5,300 years. This is the oldest known date for the Iron Age worldwide.

Sivakalai first created a buzz in 2021 after rice husks found in a burial urn were carbon-dated to 3,200 years old by Beta Analytic Lab in the US.

The museum will have details about the glorious Iron Age across India and display artefacts from several Iron Age sites in Tamil Nadu, including Mayiladumparai and Kilnamandi, from the prehistoric, Neolithic, and Early Historic periods.

Tools from different ages – lower Palaeolithic, middle Palaeolithic, upper Palaeolithic, Microlithic, and Neolithic will also be displayed along with rock shelter paintings.

DECCAN HERALD
ESTABLISHED 1948

Weed out ineligible BPL card holders

Karnataka today presents a striking economic contradiction. It boasts the highest per capita income in the country at Rs 2,04,605, far above the national average of Rs 1,14,710. It is India's fourth-largest economy, the second-largest contributor to the goods and services tax (GST), and one of the fastest-growing large states, recording a robust gross state domestic product growth of 12.8% in 2024–25. Multidimensional poverty has fallen sharply from 16.55% in 2013–14 to just 5.67% in 2025. Yet, paradoxically, Karnataka also has the highest number of below poverty line (BPL) cards in India. As Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda admitted on the floor of the Assembly, an astonishing 73–75% of Karnataka's population holds BPL cards — an astronomically abnormal figure for a high-income state. This is not merely an administrative anomaly; it is evidence of systemic failure. BPL cards are meant for households earning less than Rs 1.2 lakh annually. Instead, the state has 4.44 crore people categorised under priority households, many of whom are demonstrably ineligible. The Centre has already flagged 7.76 lakh suspicious beneficiaries — income tax payers, company directors, individuals with GST turnover above Rs 25 lakh, and even those holding ration cards in other states.

Karnataka should make sure benefits meant for the poor are not cornered by the affluent

The consequences of this are severe. When the affluent corner welfare benefits, the most vulnerable lose access to essential support. Every kilogram of subsidised rice drawn by an ineligible household under Anna Bhagya reduces what could have gone to a malnourished family. The state's welfare bill — over Rs 56,000 crore annually for schemes such as Gruha Lakshmi and Anna Bhagya — becomes fiscally unsustainable when stretched to cover those who do not need assistance. These funds could instead have been channelled into long-term investments in schools, hospitals and infrastructure.

The government's ongoing clean-up drive, which has already cancelled or converted 2.34 lakh to 4.9 lakh cards, is both necessary and overdue. Since Aadhaar seeding alone cannot validate income, the government must move towards technology-led cross-verification with income tax records, land databases, vehicle registrations, and government payrolls. This course correction is not about reducing welfare; it is about restoring its moral and fiscal legitimacy. A prosperous state cannot afford a poverty database built on falsehoods. Every bogus card weakens the social contract, drains public money, and steals from those who truly need the state's support. The state should choose between subsidising comfort and prioritising genuine poverty alleviation. Unfortunately, vote-bank politics repeatedly overrides administrative integrity, turning social welfare into a tool of patronage rather than a ladder out of poverty.

Deplorable attack on spirit of cinema

The denial of screening permission for some films at the just-concluded International Film Festival of Kerala (IFFK) again raises questions about threats to freedom of expression and the government's meddling in cultural institutions. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting had communicated to the Kerala government that some films slated for the festival should not be screened. Although as many as 19 films were denied censorship exemptions, over the days, clearances were granted for some. This affected the overall scheduling. It created an unprecedented situation and signalled that the instinct for censorship was expanding into new areas. The Kerala government announced that it would defy the denial of censorship exemption and directed the organisers to screen all slated films. But the screening of some films was eventually cancelled. Though it was claimed that the denial of exemption was due to procedural reasons, it is widely held that it was politically motivated. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan strongly criticised the ministry's action and said it was "yet another move to impose the Sangh Parivar agenda of suppressing diversity and voices of dissent."

By blocking festival films, govt comes across as ignorant and intolerant

There were no convincing grounds for the denial of exemption — uninformed in some cases, ridiculous in others, and wrong and unfair in all cases. One film that did not get clearance was *Battleship Potemkin*, an all-time classic, whose 100th anniversary falls this year. Among those denied screening were some Palestinian films, raising the doubt that they were disfavoured because they were Palestinian. *The Hour of the Furnaces*, a 1968 political documentary from Argentina about revolutionary activism, also drew disapproval. A Spanish film titled *Beef* did not pass muster because, presumably, beef is not just an objectionable food item but also an unacceptable word. Ironically, the film has nothing to do with beef — it is about hip-hop culture. Obviously, the film was not seen by those who decided against it. In this scenario, Charlie Chaplin's classic *The Great Dictator* had no chance. All these films have been screened at many other festivals.

The ministry has the power to deny a censorship exemption for a film if it affects the country's security and integrity, disturbs law and order, or impacts relations with other countries. None of these films could be rejected on those grounds. The decision could have been prompted by ignorance, as with Beef, or motivated by a mischievous wish to unsettle a popular cultural event in an Opposition-ruled state. Beyond that, it is an attack on freedom of speech and expression and a sign of narrow politics that seeks to crush the diverse, cosmopolitan nature of the artistic spirit.

HIGHER EDUCATION

The quantity vs quality debate

India needs a two-pronged approach, like in the US — one that values excellence as much as expansion

JITAMITRA DESAI

India's higher education system has undergone a dramatic transformation over the past seven decades. From a mere 20 universities in 1947, the country now boasts around 1,200 universities and 45,000 colleges, with nearly four crore students enrolled in full-time and part-time programmes.

Despite this significant push towards ensuring access to education for everyone, India's Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), i.e., the percentage of individuals aged 18-23 enrolled in higher education (a globally recognised key indicator of access to education), currently stands close to 28%.

In comparison, the GER in the United States and China are at 70% and 55%, respectively, which underscores the glaring gap between India and more advanced nations. To bridge this gap and transform India's demographic advantage into a skilled workforce, the National Education Policy (NEP) of 2020 sets an ambitious target of achieving a minimum GER of 50% by 2035.

To achieve this ambitious GER target of 50%, India would need to double its capacity, i.e., open twice as many universities/colleges and enrol twice as many students, as compared to its current levels by 2035.

To improve GER rapidly, one option is to lean on the country's top institutions and push them towards ever-increasing enrolments. Given the sense of urgency, this can only be done via an "online degree" mechanism. Consequently, some of these offerings are already sprouting from such elite institutions.

This brings us to the quality aspect of higher education in India. For India to truly become '*atma* nirbhar', we must push the research envelope and uplift higher education institutions to global standards.

In the QS World University Rankings 2026, only six Indian institutions feature in the global top 250, with IIT Delhi and IIT Kanpur being ranked 123rd and 222nd, respectively. In programme-wise rankings, only IIM Bangalore has broken into the top 30 with its flagship PGP (2-year full time MBA) programme. Central and state universities are nowhere to be found, either at the university-level or even in programme-wise rankings.

In contrast, China's Peking University ranks 14th globally, and multiple Chinese universities consistently appear in the top 50. The US dominates the top 10 with MIT, Stanford, and Harvard leading the list.

This disparity underscores the challenge: India has to rapidly expand its footprint to provide increased access to education ("quantity") while also enabling its elite institutions to catch up to their international peers in global reputation ("quality").

It is unreasonable to expect the top-tier institutions in the country to educate the vast swathe of students while simultaneously rising in global rankings that are heavily influenced by

research. The task of achieving quality and quantity must be a shared responsibility between institutions of eminence as well as central/state universities and affiliated colleges.

To address these twin challenges, we must look towards the United States and learn from their educational successes over the last century. In the US, a "dual-branch" system that differentiates universities based on their research or teaching focus becomes evident.

For example, undergraduate programmes in state universities such as Texas A&M University or The Ohio State University cater to nearly 70,000 students each and provide a good quality education to all these students. These state universities serve as the backbone of America, fuelling an educated workforce into the economy and moving people up the socioeconomic mobility ladder.

Conversely, the US also has universities, such as Caltech and Princeton, which take the best students in the world, provide extremely high-quality education, and push the boundaries of scientific research.

For India to achieve quantity and quality simultaneously, the blueprint is clear: Create a dual-branch system that: (i) mandates a relentless pursuit of research excellence for the top-tier institutions in the country, unencumbered by governmental guidelines, and an ability to chart their own path towards scientific excellence in their chosen fields ("small and elite"); and (ii) identifies central/state universities and their affiliate colleges as vehicles responsible for primarily teaching the large swathe of students that in turn enables movement up the socioeconomic ladder and develops a skilled workforce required for our industry to compete globally ("large and qualified").

This dual-branch system recognises that not every lecturer in the country needs to do research; and not every college in the country is equipped for world-class research. Removing research expectations from these faculty gives the necessary clarity to be exclusively teaching oriented.

As the mandates of universities/colleges across this dual-branch system are different, so are the resources required for them to succeed. India needs to allocate 6% of its GDP towards education (as recommended in NEP 2020), and alongside this must come the academic freedom and governance, defined as broadly as possible, required for our top universities to scale research peaks.

For central or state universities and their affiliate colleges, mandated with only teaching responsibilities, the faculty to student ratio must be close to 1:18 (as recommended by global standards). Stringent accreditation is another key building block, which ensures that the minimum quality teaching standards are met and a system of checks-and-balances is set in place.

India's higher education system stands at a critical juncture. Expanding access to education is vital for social and economic progress but ignoring parallel improvements in quality risks producing graduates with limited competence.

Achieving the vision outlined in the National Education Policy requires a two-pronged approach, one that values excellence as much as expansion. By creating the dual-branch system advocated in this article, India can transform its higher education landscape into a globally competitive system that empowers its youth and drives national development.

(The author is a Professor of Decision Sciences at the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore. The views expressed in this article are personal)

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE

A New Year makeover

Youthful exuberance had edged out snobbery that freezing night

GEORGE NETTO

It was the fag end of 1965 in the remote tea estate where I worked. I was overwhelmed with official work. I knew I wouldn't be spending New Year's Day with my parents as I always did.

However, I wasn't alone. Hugh Muir, a 19-year-old Scotsman from Glasgow, had recently joined the tea estate as an assistant manager. With the typical aloofness and reserve of the British, he kept very much to himself, cocooned in loneliness and perhaps homesickness.

My colleagues and I sociably tried to befriend Hugh. However, his keen awareness of his status as an assistant manager and the rigid social barriers that persisted on plantations at the time seemed to be a hurdle. So we let the matter rest.

Soon it was New Year's Eve. Our local staff club was splendidly decked out. A huge log fire crackled on the lawn as we members huddled around it, warming ourselves and chatting. It was to be a New Year's dinner get-together.

In the darkness, I noticed a stocky figure hovering uncertainly near the club gate. It was Hugh, unsure whether to enter. I rose and invited him in. Grinning shyly, he joined us around the bonfire, the leaping flames lighting up his freckled face. He seemed pretty relieved to be accepted by us. Obviously, sheer boredom had driven him to hobnob with us.

Then someone turned up the music. Quite unexpectedly, Hugh rose and, shedding all his inhibitions, broke into what appeared to be an impromptu Scottish jig. He danced solo with gay abandon, blond head thrown back and arms swinging rhythmically. He seemed lost in a world of his own, perhaps living out his fantasies. But he did know how to shake a leg.

Infected by his enthusiasm, we joined in, trying hard to synchronise our steps with his. We must have looked bizarre as we let down our hair and danced unselfconsciously. When the music stopped, Hugh himself led the collective applause.

Bonded by a newfound feeling of bonhomie, more restraint-free dancing followed, this time with our arms linked like buddies. Then, as church bells chimed in the birth of 1966, Hugh burst into a solo rendition of Auld Lang Syne in a Scottish dialect that was Greek to us. Hearty back-slapping and handshakes followed before Hugh joined us for an alfresco dinner, his face flushing crimson as the spicy mutton curry took its toll!

Looking back, youthful exuberance had decisively edged out snobbery that freezing night.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Proposed law jeopardises autonomy of universities

Your editorial 'A test of academic autonomy, federalism' (Dec. 20) tolls a caution bell regarding the dangers inherent in the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishtan bill introduced in the Lok Sabha and referred to a joint parliamentary committee. Though the bill appears to aim at overhauling the regulation of higher education in the country by simplifying and streamlining it by repealing the UGC Act, the AICTE Act, and the NCTE Act, the danger of extinguishing diversity under centralised power lies hidden in its agenda.

The Central government, in its bid to control higher education to further its political interests and ideology, seems to be playing ducks and drakes with universities and other higher education institutions through increased administrative and financial powers, including control over ideas, textbook content, and faculty selection. The universities that enjoy autonomy under the current federal setup will be severely constrained in their academic and administrative activities.

Measured against Jawaharlal Nehru's vision of a university as a space for humanism, tolerance, reason and the adventure of ideas, the universities contemplated under this Bill fall far short. Moreover, the Bill strips states of even their limited powers under the Concurrent List, striking at the root of federalism. This assault on the Constitution's federal structure is deplorable.

M Basavaraj, Davanagere

Keep speech free

Apropos 'Hate speech bill: BJP to approach Prez ' (Dec 21), the hate bill proposed by the Karnataka government criminalises expressions arising from disharmony or ill-will rather than requiring proven malicious intent, which will undoubtedly suppress freedom of expression. While spreading hatred is inherently wrong regardless of its intensity, expressing an opinion or pointing out the misconduct of others should not be penalised. There already exists a body of laws that address various forms of hate speech. Every citizen possesses the right to speak out against wrongdoing, and such actions must not be classified as hate speech.

Aditya M K, Bengaluru

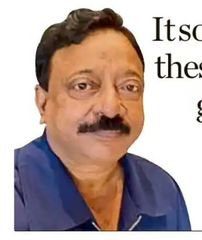
Cards for street vendors

Apropos 'No cover for city's street vendors' (Dec 20), the protests by the affected street vendors over delays in issuing identity and verification cards, as stipulated by the basic norms of survival, are natural attempts to fend for themselves, given the apathy of administration and officialdom after enforcement. The overcrowding of street vendors should be regulated by demarcating areas and issuing limited permits, thereby shifting their activity to other areas under the supervision of Sangha representatives and officials. Hope the problem reaches a logical conclusion, giving the aggrieved street vendors a sigh of relief.

S Sundaresh, Bengaluru

Our readers are welcome to email letters to: **letters@deccanherald.co.in** (only letters emailed – not handwritten – will be accepted). All letters must carry the sender's postal address and phone number.

SPEAK OUT



It sounds nice that I inspired all these great directors to become great, but when will I, the inspirer, become great?

Ram Gopal Verma, Filmmaker

Every time a friend succeeds, I die a little.
Gore Vidal

TO BE PRECISE

Momentum in the inclusion movement

NGOs, start-ups, and corporates are giving jobs and dignity to the specially abled

ANITA R SINGH

Earlier this month, as the world observed the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, India had much to reflect on. Over the past decade, the country has been reshaping its approach to disability — from viewing persons with disabilities (PwDs) through a charity lens to recognising them as citizens with rights and ambitions.

A key milestone was the enactment of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, aligned with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. By expanding recognised categories of disability from seven to 21, mandating accessibility across public and private spaces, strengthening anti-discrimination provisions, and introducing accountability in hiring and education, the Act has established a strong legal framework for inclusion.

Changemakers

Across India, institutions and organisations have played a role in implementing these policies in practice. One example is Mitti Cafe. It began at BVB College in Hubballi under the leadership of Alina Alam and has since expanded into a network of more than 50 cafés operated by persons with disabilities. Early support came from ANZ GCC in Bengaluru, the first corporate partner. Subsequently, additional corporate sponsorships and institutional partnerships have enabled the organisation to scale its operations.

From airports in Bengaluru and Mumbai to the Supreme Court of India and even Rashtrapati Bhavan, these cafes have transformed public perception of disability through their 'Magic of Abilities'. A broader ecosystem, however, is driving this change across India through a network of organisations providing employment, dignity, and independence to PwDs.

For instance, AssisTech Foundation, India's first ecosystem for assistive technology start-ups, is driving innovation through leaders such as Prateek Madhav and his team, who are developing tools that facilitate mobility and access.

The Samarthanam Art Centre in Bengaluru has supported creative expression among PwDs, challenging assumptions about talent. Enable India and Samarthanam Trust have developed accessible skilling and employment models now adopted by corporates nationwide. RampMyCity, founded by Prateek Khandelwal, has improved building accessibility. On a personal note, I was able to take my mother, who has age-related mobility challenges, to the Basavanagudi temple because a ramp had been installed.

For nearly five decades, Jaipur Foot has provided free prosthetic fittings—over 2.2 million (22 lakh) as of March 2024—restoring mobility to people across India and abroad.

Organisations such as the Association of People with Disabilities (1959), the Disability NGO Alliance (2014), and the India Business Disability Network, launched in 2019 through a CII-EFI-ILO initiative, play an important role in institutionalising inclusion across industries. The incubation ecosystem—through Social Venture Partners India, NSRCEL at IIM Bangalore, and the Nudge Institute—continues to support disability-led start-ups.

Govt initiatives

Government bodies such as the Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment and state disability departments are further driving momentum by introducing schemes, such as the Unique Disability ID, to standardise access to benefits.

India has also been a global pioneer in autism inclusion. In 2011, V R Ferose, then managing director of SAP Labs India, began working with people on the autism spectrum—a move that evolved into 'Autism at Work' at SAP, now regarded as a benchmark employment model, because they recognised that persons with autism have a special aptitude for coding.

Ferose's continued advocacy, through the India Inclusion Summit and initiatives such as 'Everyone Is Good at Something', is shaping how other organisations globally think about neurodiversity today.

Changing mindsets

According to the 2011 Census, India has 26.8 million PwDs, a figure that is certainly higher, once hidden and unreported disabilities are accounted for. Today, more of them are visible in workplaces, public spaces and media narratives than ever before. Corporates are beginning to view disability inclusion as a talent imperative rather than a corporate social responsibility obligation.

The road ahead remains challenging, as accessibility gaps persist, employment levels require a decisive boost, and societal attitudes must continue to shift.

Yet, the momentum is real and gathering pace. A reminder of what determined inclusion can unlock comes through 'Grit: The Vishwas Story,' a compelling account of Vishwas' journey navigating life, overcoming challenges and achieving remarkable milestones.

As writer Vivek Shanbhag observes, it "depicts the endless possibilities of the human spirit," a sentiment that mirrors what India's disability movement is, at last, beginning to demonstrate at scale.

(The writer is the Chairperson, The Department of Organisational Behaviour & Human Resources Management, Ramaiah Institute of Management, Bengaluru).

What SHANTI Bill means to regional energy security

KAVYA WADHWA

The Atomic Energy Bill 2025, titled SHANTI (Sustainable Harnessing of Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India), marks more than legislative reform. It acknowledges that India's energy future can no longer rely on a centralised monopoly built for a different era. While the Bill's implications stretch from Tarapur to Kakrapar, the southern states offer the clearest evidence that reform is overdue.

Karnataka and Tamil Nadu are not simply asking for more power; they are demanding infrastructure aligned with their economic ambitions. Karnataka targets a $1 trillion economy by 2035, while Tamil Nadu aims for $1 trillion by 2030 and $2.6 trillion by 2047.

These goals are necessities, not slogans. Bengaluru's tech parks consume 40% of Karnataka's commercial electricity, and Chennai accounts for one-third of India's automobile production. Yet both states face peak-hour deficits despite hosting Kaiga's record 962-day continuous operation and Kudankulam's 2,000 MW capacity.

The data centre boom sharpens this urgency. Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and Chennai are emerging as hubs for Microsoft, Google, and Amazon. A single large data centre requires 50–100 MW of uninterrupted power. As AI workloads grow and India positions itself as a global cloud infrastructure hub, the question is not whether nuclear energy is needed, but whether it can be deployed quickly enough. Intermittent renewables alone cannot meet this demand.

The SHANTI Bill's opening to private participation—from uranium mining to reactor operation—is a pragmatic response. Achieving the 100 GW nuclear target by 2047 requires capital and innovation beyond the public sector's capacity. Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) can be deployed near industrial clusters such as Hosur or Visakhapatnam, reducing transmission needs. This is not ideological privatisation but economic necessity.

Concerns over safety and control are legitimate. The answer lies in regulatory design, not blanket exclusion. The Bill draws firm boundaries: enrichment beyond notified limits, spent fuel reprocessing, and high-level waste management remain state monopolies. Sensitive technologies stay under central oversight, a non-negotiable sovereignty requirement. National security licensing provisions restrict ownership by entities inimical to India's interests. Capital and innovation are welcomed, but strategic control remains with the state.

The Bill's four-tier dispute resolution framework reflects a philosophy of safety through institutional architecture rather than assumption.

The first tier is the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB), responsible for licensing and oversight. While its technical expertise is essential, it is not the final arbiter.

The second tier, the Atomic Energy Redressal Advisory Council (AERAC), is a statutory body created under Section 47 to independently review regulatory decisions. Section 48 mandates a 60-day resolution window, preventing project-stalling delays while preserving due process.

The third tier is the Appellate Tribunal for Electricity under Section 51, also bound by a 60-day timeline. Crucially, Section 50 mandates the inclusion of technical members with expertise in nuclear science, radiation safety, and reactor physics alongside judicial members. Nuclear disputes cannot be resolved through legal interpretation alone; scientific grounding is essential.

The fourth tier is the Supreme Court, ensuring constitutional oversight and protection against both regulatory overreach and uninformed intervention.

This structure balances investor confidence with public safety. Time-bound, technically informed adjudication provides bankability for projects spanning decades, while layered oversight protects citizens' interests.

The Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010, born of the Bhopal legacy, aimed to ensure supplier accountability. In practice, it deterred participation without materially strengthening victim protection. The SHANTI Bill adopts a more functional approach. It sets a Rs 3,000 crore per-incident liability cap, with operators fully liable up to that amount and the Central Government covering any excess claims under the Convention on Supplementary Compensation. Operator recourse against suppliers is allowed only when contractually specified or in cases of intentional damage.

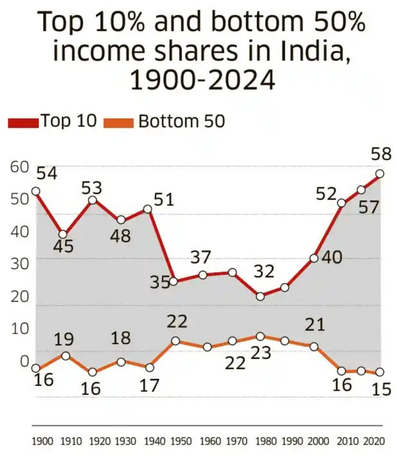
This framework prioritises swift, assured compensation backed by a sovereign guarantee, while aligning India with international norms that make vendor participation feasible. Without such alignment, proposed nuclear parks would remain paper projects.

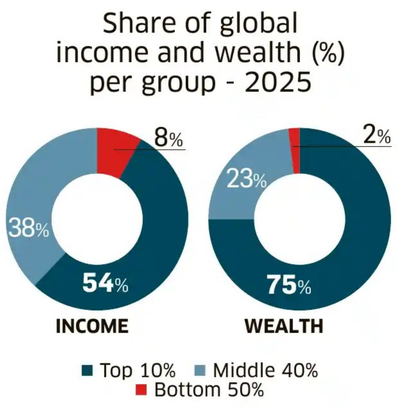
Southern India's energy needs underscore this necessity. Tamil Nadu leads in wind power but requires baseload capacity to address intermittency. Karnataka's Tier-2 cities need reliable power to support industrial expansion beyond Bengaluru. Andhra Pradesh's manufacturing push and Telangana's data centre expansion demand scalable, carbon-free electricity.

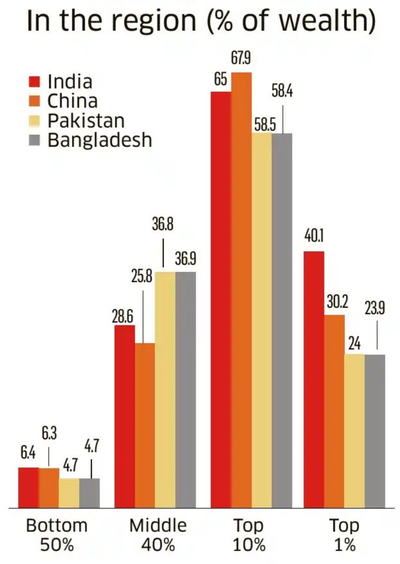
The SHANTI Bill enables multiple reactor technologies: pressurised heavy-water reactors leveraging India's thorium reserves, light-water reactors for faster deployment, and advanced modular designs for distributed clusters. Regional manufacturing ecosystems—from Bengaluru's technology base to Chennai's automotive corridor—can now enter nuclear equipment fabrication, creating engineering hubs with global relevance.

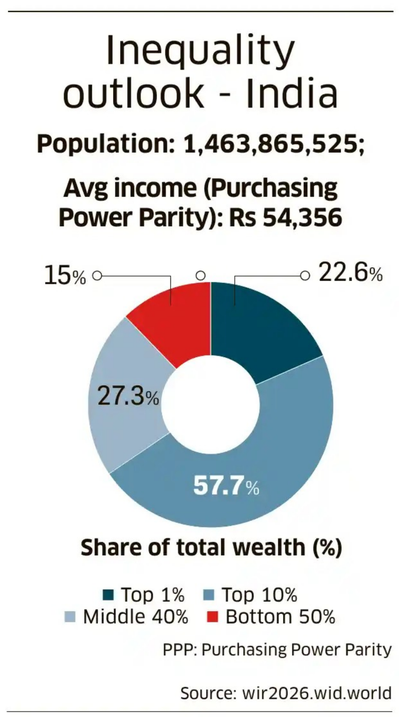
The legislative foundation is in place. For the region's economic ambitions and climate commitments, nuclear power is no longer optional. The test now lies in implementation—ensuring safety, transparency, and foresight match the Bill's ambition.

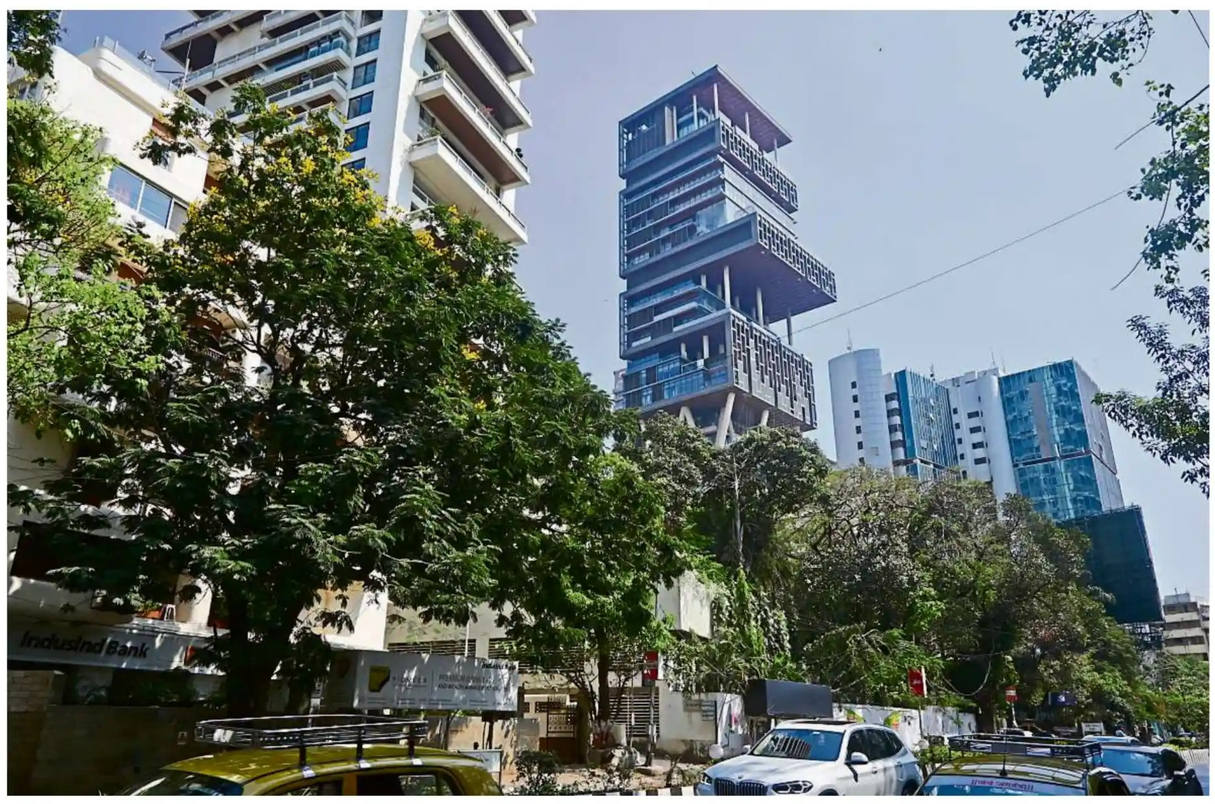
(The writer is a nuclear energy advocate and policy analyst)











Inequality report: Top 1% hold 40% of India's wealth

The country has a long way to go in addressing income and wealth disparities

DH NEWS SERVICE

Income inequality in India remains among the highest in the world and has shown little movement in recent years. The top 10% of earners capture about 58% of national income, while the bottom 50% receive only 15%.

Wealth inequality is even greater, with the richest 10% holding around 65% of total wealth and the top 1% about 40%, according to the 'World Inequality Report 2026'.

The report, released by the World Inequality Lab, reveals that the income gap between the top 10% and the bottom 50% remained stable between 2014 and 2024.

Average annual income per capita in India is around 6,200 euros, or around Rs 6.5 lakh (purchasing power parity - PPP), and average wealth stands at about 28,000 euros, or around Rs 29.4 lakh (PPP).

According to the report, female labour participation remains very low at 15.7%, showing no improvement over the past decade.

"Overall, inequality in India remains deeply entrenched across income, wealth, and gender dimensions, highlighting persistent structural divides within the economy," the report, prefaced by economists Jayati Ghosh and Joseph Stiglitz, states.

The 2026 report is the third edition in the series, following the 2018 and 2022 editions. The reports draw on the work of over 200 scholars worldwide, affiliated with the World Inequality Lab and contributing to the largest database on the historical evolution of global inequality.

Ricardo Gómez-Carrera, the lead author of the report, has said that "inequality is silent until it becomes scandalous". "This report gives voice to inequality – and to the billions of people whose opportunities are frustrated by today's unequal social and economic structures."

Trends at the global level

The report notes that globally, income and wealth have reached "historic highs but remain very unevenly distributed". For example, the report notes that the top 0.001%—fewer than 60,000 multimillionaires—hold three times as much wealth as the entire bottom 50% of humanity combined. Their share has grown steadily from almost 4% in 1995 to over 6%, which underscores the persistence of inequality.

"Extreme wealth inequality is rapidly increasing. Since the 1990s, the wealth of billionaires and centi-millionaires has grown at approximately 8% annually, nearly twice the rate of growth experienced by the bottom half of the population. The result is a world in which a tiny minority commands unprecedented financial power, while billions remain excluded from even basic economic stability," says the report.

This imbalance is compounded by regional disparities, as South and Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa lag far behind North America, Oceania and Europe, according to the report. Within almost every region, the top 1% alone holds more wealth than the bottom 90% combined.

According to the report, the global top 10% owns three-quarters of all wealth, while the bottom 50% holds just 2%. "Zooming further in, the concentration becomes staggering. The top 1% alone, roughly the adult population of the United Kingdom, controls 37% of global wealth. This is more than 18 times the wealth of the entire bottom half of the world population, a group as large as the combined adult populations of China, India, the United States, Indonesia, Nigeria, Brazil, and Russia."

The report terms gender inequality "among the most persistent and pervasive divides". Globally, women capture just over a quarter of total labour income, a share that has barely shifted since 1990. Women continue to work more and earn less than men. On average, women work 53 hours per week, compared with 43 for men, after domestic and care work is accounted for. Yet their work is consistently valued less, according to the report.

The report also shows that contributions to climate change are far from evenly distributed. While public debate often focuses on emissions associated with consumption, recent studies have revealed that capital ownership plays a critical role in emissions inequality. "The global wealthiest 10% of individuals account for 77% of global emissions associated with private capital ownership and 47% of global emissions associated with their consumption, underscoring how the climate crisis is closely tied to the concentration of wealth. Addressing it requires a targeted realignment of the financial and investment structures that fuel both emissions and inequality."

'Missing twins' in our labour market

KAIBALYAPATI MISHRA AND KRISHNA RAJ

Bollywood wage debates, such as Aamir Khan's recent (2013) claim that female actors are paid less because they "bring fewer footfalls," a logic often presented as market reward. Yet this logic assumes away the structural sorting that precedes pay-setting. Female actors are routinely channelled into narrower, supportive, and shorter-duration roles that offer lower narrative centrality and screen time. If occupational roles themselves are gendered, the capacity to "attract audiences" is not an innate individual human-capital trait but a socially constructed outcome of limited opportunities to headline films, build star power, or shape a film's commercial identity. Unequal pay cannot be justified solely by market demand; the market itself is shaped by biased sorting.

In labour markets, women and men with comparable qualifications often enter fundamentally different job roles. When wage gaps are decomposed, the portion explained by characteristics such as education or experience often pales in comparison to the "unexplained" component—commonly interpreted as discrimination. But sorting speaks to what happens before discrimination is measured. When women are initially assigned to lower-return roles, the "market" rewards them less because they were never placed in higher-return roles.

So, does higher education function as a leveller, enabling women to move out of low-paying occupational clusters, or does the labour market continue to reproduce gendered sorting even when educational credentials are equivalent? In theory, education is a powerful signal of capability, meant to reduce employers' uncertainty and narrow discriminatory gaps. In practice, however, persistent gendered occupational patterns suggest that education alone may not offset entrenched norms that shape who is hired into which roles, who is promoted, and who is perceived as "suited" for leadership or high-return positions.

India's labour market faces gender disparities as the most persistent challenge. Now, women enrol in higher education at rates that rival—and in some streams even surpass—those of men, yet this has not translated into proportional representation in the workforce as their presence in the labour market remains disproportionately low. And even when women do enter the workforce, the gender pay gap remains stark. Even educated women continue to face unequal rewards for equal qualifications. Empirical studies often estimate gender wage gaps by comparing average earnings between men and women. However, the validity of such comparisons depends critically on whether the two groups are truly comparable. When we imagine a man and a woman as a "twin pair," the question of comparability extends far beyond simple averages—it encompasses occupation, education level, experience, family background, and other contextual factors. Assessment of gender wage differences is possible only when we compare such "twins," men and women who are alike in all observable characteristics. So, are we comparing true twins? And among twins, does the wage gap persist?

In India, this problem is referred to as a lack of common support. In countries such as Switzerland and other developed nations, such issues do exist, but the lack of common support is much more pronounced. That is, some occupations are completely segregated for men, and some occupations are completely segregated for women. But in the case of India, this problem is quite asymmetric. A reasonable explanation is that, in India, for occupations with a higher share of female workers, we have very few comparable men as we move up the ladder of women-dominated occupations. However, this does not happen the other way around. Thus, even within occupations, there is segregation: segments in which only women work without comparable men, and segments in which men do have comparable women. This pattern does not mirror that observed in female-dominated jobs.

So how does this lack of comparable "twins" affect us? The basic interpretation is that women and men work in entirely different occupations. Even within similar occupations, men and women tend to perform different roles. The problem that arises when decomposing the gender gap in such a setting is that the wage-setting process is not comparable in the absence of an appropriate reference group. We cannot simply say: "A woman is doing this job and earning this amount—what would a man earn if he did the same job?" To make such statements, we require comparable reference workers, and this is precisely what the lack of common support denies us.

(Kaibalyapathi Mishra is a Senior Research Fellow and Krishna Raj is a Professor of Economics at CESP , ISEC , Bengaluru)

OUR PAGES OF HISTORY

50 YEARS AGO: DECEMBER 1975

Gunmen storm HQ of OPEC, hold ministers hostage

Vienna, December 21
A group of guerrillas stormed the headquarters of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) here today, sprayed the building with machine gun fire and seized about 30 hostages, including senior Ministers from nine OPEC member nations. Among those held was Sheikh Ahmed Zaki Yamani, the influential Oil Minister of Saudi Arabia. Unconfirmed reports said the leader of the terrorist group was a Venezuelan and their demands were connected with Saudi Arabia.

25 YEARS AGO: DECEMBER 2000

Sonia mounts attack on PM

New Delhi, Dec 21 (PTI)
Congress President Sonia Gandhi today launched an attack on Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, describing him as a man committed to the Sangh Parivar philosophy for over half a century and accusing him of being "morally responsible" for rejecting the resignations of the chargesheeted Union ministers in the Babri Masjid demolition case. "It is clear beyond a shadow of doubt that the Prime Minister is, indeed, himself a swayamsevak of 60 years standing who is committed to the philosophy of the Sangh Parivar," Ms Gandhi added.

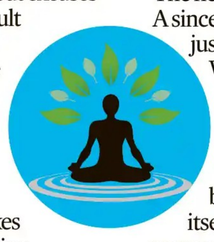
OASIS | CHINMAY HOTA

Turn your mistakes into stepping stones

"The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall." Nelson Mandela's words remind us that failure need not define us. What matters is our willingness to recognise our mistakes and choose a better path forward.

We all carry regrets. Perhaps we spoke harshly to someone we love, acted out of ego, or ignored another's pain because our own struggles consumed us. Such moments linger, quietly eroding our peace and straining relationships. Over time, the weight of unacknowledged mistakes can feel overwhelming, leading us to believe we are beyond repair.

Yet the truth is liberating: we have the capacity to change. Transformation begins with honest self-reflection. This requires looking inward without excuses or judgment and asking difficult questions. Where did we fall short? When did pride silence accountability? How often did we choose ease over empathy? Though uncomfortable, this introspection is essential for growth.



Acknowledging our mistakes takes courage. It means lowering our defences and accepting that imperfection is part of being human. Pretending otherwise distances us from both ourselves and others. When we admit our faults with humility, we create space for healing and connection.

The next step is making amends. A sincere apology, offered without justification, can be powerful. Whether through words or actions, reaching out to those we have hurt signals a genuine commitment to change. Not every wound can be fully healed, but the effort itself matters. It shows awareness, responsibility, and respect for the impact of our actions.

Equally important is learning to forgive ourselves. Self-condemnation keeps us anchored to the past and serves no purpose beyond prolonging pain. Growth becomes possible only when we accept our errors, draw lessons from them, and move forward with intention. Letting go of guilt is not denial; it is choosing progress over paralysis.

Change is rarely immediate. It requires patience, persistence, and repeated effort. We will falter again because we are human. But each conscious choice to act with kindness, speak thoughtfully, and live with integrity shapes the person we are becoming. Our mistakes, when faced honestly, can become the foundation for wisdom and compassion. The path to redemption remains open to all who are willing to walk it.

From 'monument of failure' to rebrand: Why BJP is recasting MGNREGA

The move is seen as an attempt to seize narrative control from the Opposition

SHEMIN JOY
NEW DELHI, DHNS

Ten years ago, Prime Minister Narendra Modi mockingly vowed to keep MGNREGA 'alive as a monument of UPA's failures' but the move to replace it with 'VB-G RAM G' now is seen as an attempt to rob the Opposition of an avenue to target the government in a similar manner it took the the sting out of the campaign built around Caste Census.

PM Modi has been facing criticism from the Opposition over his comments against the backdrop of the MGNREGA becoming a lifeline for the rural folks during the Covid-19 pandemic. He had said his 'political acumen' has told him to 'keep MNREGA alive as a monument to your failures since Independence', as they were 'still making people dig holes' after 60 years.

Despite running it even after being critical of it, the BJP could not put its stamp on the scheme as people identify it as a UPA scheme and the government appears to have adopted the same strategy to tackle the perception problem it did to tackle the question of Caste Census.

As Rahul Gandhi made it one of his core issues that gathered some traction, the government announced Caste Census to be conducted along with the general Census. The decision effectively kept the issue out of the election campaign in Bihar.

Congress sees a pattern in the new rural job guarantee scheme – renaming the previous government's schemes to present it as their own.

Last week, Congress' social media and digital platforms chairperson, Supriya Shrinate, listed 32 schemes, which were 'renamed' by the Modi government.

On Friday, Congress General Secretary (Communications) Jairam Ramesh said the Modi government is on its way to finish off the UPA government's 'landmark' initiatives one by one.

He said RTI and MGNREGA are finished and it will target the Forest Rights Act, Land Acquisition Act and National Food Security Act, which was renamed as PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana.

With the tweak in the scheme and renaming the Bill that invokes the name of Lord Ram, a symbol it has politically used, the government expects that it would have more control on the narrative around the rural job guarantee scheme.

SCHEME OF THINGS

- Despite running MNREGA even after being critical of it, the BJP could not put its stamp on the scheme as people identify it as a UPA scheme
- Opposition leaders said the Centre could easily wash its hands off on the failure of the scheme and put the onus on states
- Opposition believes that changing the character of the scheme would boomerang on the government in case of rural distress
- The new law makes states partners in funding, not just implementers, demanding higher financial commitment

The objections

Opposition leaders said the Centre could easily wash its hands off on the failure of the scheme and put the onus on states.

Initially, the media had reported after a Cabinet meeting earlier this month that the Bill would be renamed as 'Pujya Bapu Gramin Rozgar Yojana,' but on December 13, it came to light that the Bill would bear the name of Ram in an acronym.

A senior Opposition leader said that with the Centre fixing its budget and any expenditure beyond that has to be met by the state, it would eventually lead to the killing of the scheme.

The Opposition believes that changing the character of the scheme would boomerang on the government in case of rural distress.

From making it a 'demand-driven' scheme to 'supply-driven' and mandating states to substantially fund it, they feel it would squeeze the scheme.

Incidentally, states made to share 40% funds for the scheme have not come out of the blue, as Union Minister Giriraj Singh, when he was Rural Development Minister in Modi 2.0, had publicly said that states should also bear the financial burden of the scheme, reasoning that it would help in tackling pilferage in the scheme.

VB-G RAM G Bill gets Prez assent

NEW DELHI, DHNS: President Droupadi Murmu has given her assent to the Viksit Bharat — Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) or Bill, 2025, which has now become the VB-G RAM G Act, 2025, and will replace the 20-year-old Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

The President gave her assent to the new Act on Saturday, said a gazette notification issued by the Union Ministry of Law and Justice on Sunday.

The new rural employment guarantee law was passed by Parliament on Thursday amid vociferous protests by the Opposition, which objected to making it a supply-driven scheme and making states fund 40% of the programme.

The new Act guarantees 125 days of employment to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to undertake unskilled manual work.

The Union government has not notified a date for the new law's implementation. Once it is done, the MGNREGA will cease to exist.

The new Act also said that till new rules and wages are notified, those prescribed under the MGNREGA will continue to be in effect.

A Ministry of Rural Development statement said the new law replaces the MGNREGA with a modern statutory framework that enhances livelihood security and is aligned with the national vision of Viksit Bharat in 2047.

Bangladesh 'rejects' MEA comments on protest in Delhi

DHAKA, PTI: Bangladesh on Sunday rejected India's comments over the demonstration in front of its high commission in New Delhi, questioning how the protesters were allowed to come so close to the installation in a secured diplomatic enclave.

Interim government's foreign affairs adviser M Touhid Hossain's comments came hours after India trashed as 'misleading propaganda' reports in the Bangladesh media that a demonstration outside its mission in New Delhi against the killing of a Hindu man in Mymensingh attempted to create a security situation.

"Regarding the Indian press note, we completely reject it, entirely reject it. The issue has been presented as if it were very simple, whereas in reality it is not," state-run news agency Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS) quoted Hossain as saying.

Hossain also called the MEA statement 'oversimplified' saying "they (India) say it may have been 20–25 people, but that is not the point."

He also said the protesters also did not merely raise slogans over the killing of a Hindu man but made 'other statements as well', and claimed that reports published in Bangladeshi newspapers were not misleading.

Asked if he had any concrete proof about the alleged death threats to the Bangladesh envoy in New Delhi as speculated, the adviser replied in negative, adding both sides remain in contact through diplomatic channels.

B'desh reports on protest 'misleading', says India

Calls for punishment of those behind Hindu youth's killing

NEW DELH, DHNS/PTI

India on Sunday trashed as 'misleading propaganda' media reports in Bangladesh that a demonstration outside Bangladesh's mission in New Delhi against the killing of a Hindu man in that country attempted to create a security situation.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said about 20-25 youth gathered in front of the Bangladesh high commission on Saturday and raised slogans in protest against the 'horrendous killing' of Dipu Chandra Das in Bangladesh's Mymensingh.

Das (25) was working at a garment factory and was accused of making a blasphemous comment about Islam. The video of his brutal killing had gone viral on social media.

The MEA said the protesters also called for the protection of all minorities in Bangladesh. There was "no attempt to breach the fence or create a security situation at any time", the ministry said, adding the police dispersed the group after a few minutes, and visual evidence of these events is publicly available.

India is committed to ensuring the safety of foreign missions in its territory in accordance with the Vienna Convention, added the MEA spokesperson, Randhir Jaiswal.

'Keeping watch'

India is keeping watch on the situation in Bangladesh and has called for the punishment of the perpetrators of the barbaric killing of the youth.

New Delhi on Sunday also suspended the operations of a visa application receiving and processing facility in Chittagong in Bangladesh, in view of the recent violent protest near the Assistant High Commission of India.

As Hadi's death prompted radical organisations in Bangladesh to intensify their campaign against former prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, and her Awami League party, as well as India, New Delhi, over the past few days, temporarily suspended operations of some of its visa application and processing facilities in Dhaka, Khulna and Rajshahi. The facility in the country's capital, however, reopened later.

After Hadi, the spokesperson of Inquilab Manch, succumbed to injuries in Singapore on December 18, violent protests erupted across Bangladesh.

"India continues to keep a close watch on the evolving situation in Bangladesh," Randhir Jaiswal stated in New Delhi on Sunday.

"Our officials remain in touch with the authorities in Bangladesh and have conveyed to them our strong concerns about the attacks on minorities. We have also urged that the perpetrators of the barbaric killing of Dipu Chandra Das be brought to justice."

DELHI-SPEAK

- Our officials remain in touch with the authorities in Bangladesh, says MEA spokesperson
- Protests were triggered by death of radical leader Sharif Osman Hadi
- Agitators became violent, and a mob lynched 25-year-old garment worker Dipu Chandra Das
- Das was accused of blasphemy, although the allegation was proved to be false

Maha Yuti sweeps Maharashtra local body polls; BJP largest party

MUMBAI, DHNS

Riding on the success of the 2024 Maharashtra Assembly elections and its development agenda, the BJP-led Maha Yuti on Sunday swept the much-awaited polls to 288 municipal councils (nagar parishads) and town panchayats (nagar-panchayats), retaining the position of the No 1 party in the state and inflicting a further blow to the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA).

The Maha Yuti-NDA bagged the top post in more than 200 municipal councils and town panchayats.

The results are expected to have a bearing on the forthcoming elections to 29 municipal corporations on January 15 and 32 zilla parishads and 336 panchayat samitis, the schedule of which is yet to be announced.

The MVA seems to be finding it difficult to counter the BJP's election machinery and management, and the rift among the Opposition allies is widening.

The polls to 246 municipal councils and 42 town panchayats were held in two phases on December 2 and 20, deciding the fate of 6,859 members.

The State Election Commission has yet to formally declare the results.

However, according to the latest reports, the BJP has won the presidency in more than 120 municipal councils or town panchayats. Of the BJP's allies, the Shiv Sena won the presidentship in 50-odd places, while the NCP was victorious in around 40 places.

As far as the MVA is concerned, the Congress will preside in 34-odd corporations, while the Shiv Sena (UBT) and the NCP (SP) won eight and seven places, respectively.

It may be mentioned that the BJP got 132 seats in the Maharashtra Assembly elections, followed by the Shiv Sena (57) and the NCP (41).

"The BJP and its Maha Yuti allies have secured a massive victory... The mandate is like that of the Assembly polls," said Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis. The numbers mean "the BJP won more than double the seats than earlier", he said, adding that such a victory had not been seen in 30-35 years.

"The indications are clear: The BJP has scored a century, and the Shiv Sena has scored a half-century," said Shinde.

Maharashtra Congress president Harshavardhan Sapkal said: "Fake voters, politics of pressure, abuse of power, and heavy use of money were seen in the elections. The role of the state election commission in the victory of the ruling parties has been most important."

Shiv Sena (UBT) Rajya Sabha member Sanjay Raut said: "The BJP contests polls with money power; this will not last long."

Shiv Sena leaders and workers celebrate after winning the Maharashtra local body elections, at Balasaheb Bhavan, Nariman Point, in Mumbai, on Sunday. PTI

THE SITUATION

- Polls to 246 municipal councils and 42 town panchayats were held in two phases on December 2 and 20.
- State Election Commission yet to formally declare results.
- The BJP is tipped to win the presidency in over 120 municipal councils and town panchayats.
- The Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena is expected to secure about 50 posts.
- The Ajit-led NCP projected to win around 40.

Sena UBT-MNS alliance in a couple of days: Sanjay Raut

MUMBAI, DHNS: Amid the drubbing in the first round of local bodies, the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) and Raj Thackeray-headed MNS are expected to announce their alliance in the next couple of days for municipal corporation polls, including Mumbai.

Over the past few months, Uddhav and Raj have held a series of meetings since their coming together for the cause of 'Marathi-manoos' and 'Marathi-bhasha' after two decades.

"Our alliance will be announced by tomorrow or the day after, including details of how many seats each party will contest... our meetings have ended (and seat sharing is finalised)... today was the last meeting," said Shiv Sena (UBT) Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Raut, a close aide of Uddhav and friend of Raj.

BJP celebrates historic entry into Thiruvananthapuram corporation

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DHNS

The swearing-in of councillors of the Thiruvananthapuram corporation on Sunday witnessed the BJP's show of strength at having attained a majority in a local body in Kerala for the first time.

Senior BJP leaders, including Kerala in-charge Prakash Javadekar and state-unit president Rajeev Chandrasekhar, turned up to witness the historical moment, which attracted national attention.

BJP workers celebrated by raising slogans throughout the swearing-in ceremony. The viral parody song *Pottiye Kettiye*, which links the CPM with the Sabarimala Ayyappa temple gold heist, was even sung at some point to counter the sloganeering by CPM workers.

However, senior BJP leaders swiftly intervened and asked party workers to avoid the song.

The BJP councillors started the day's event by offering prayers at the Sree Padmanabhaswami temple and came to the corporation as part of a rally.

Mayoral polls

Though there are only 50 NDA-BJP councillors in the 101-strong council, the saffron party hopes to have a smooth sailing in capturing the mayor's post on December 26.

The CPM-led LDF, with 29 members, and the Congress-led UDF, with 19 members, are unlikely to be part of any moves with the two independents to scuttle the BJP's chance of having the mayor.

Former DGP R Sreelekha and district leader V V Rajesh are among the probable mayoral candidates of the NDA.

Kerala BJP president Rajeev Chandrasekhar (left) and party leader Prakash Javadekar during the swearing-in ceremony of newly elected local body members at the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation, on Sunday. PTI

SHANTI Bill bulldozed for 'TRUMP & ADANI': Cong

NEW DELHI, DHNS: Congress on Sunday once again targeted the Modi government over the SHANTI Bill, alleging that it was "bulldozed" in Parliament not only for "Trump but also for Adani".

It also accused the ruling BJP of "desecrating the groundbreaking law" MGNREGA, claiming it has "overturned two decades of progress".

The Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Bill and the Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) VB-G RAM G Bill were passed in Lok Sabha last week amid Opposition protest.

Quoting a media report on Adani Group planning to enter the nuclear energy sector after the passage of the bill that allows private participation in nuclear power generation, Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh said the Bill was "bulldozed" in Parliament.

"SHANTI was bulldozed through in Parliament not only for TRUMP (The Reactor Use Management Programme) but also for ADANI (Accelerated Damaging Adhiniyam for Nuclear India)," Ramesh posted on 'X'.

On VB-G RAM G Bill, he said, "two decades of progress have been overturned without consultation and by sidestepping all Parliamentary convention."

CPM's song and dance over 'parody' row has few takers

ARJUN RAGHUNATH
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DHNS

Satire has always been part of Kerala's political culture, and the recent viral political spoof — *Pottiye Kettiye, Swarnam Chembbayi Mattiye* — is no different.

Much to the discomfort of the Left Front, the parody song *Pottiye Kettiye, Swarnam Chembbayi Mattiye* (you brought Potty up and installed him, you turned gold into copper), which refers to the Sabarimala temple gold theft case and the alleged involvement of CPM leaders, became an instant hit among people.

The song, sung by Danish and produced by Subair Pandalloor and Haneefa Mudikkode, was widely circulated on social media during the campaigns for the recently concluded local body polls.

With the song becoming a major source of embarrassment for the Left Front, a police case was filed against the creators, and party leaders openly came out with statements that the song had hurt religious sentiments.

The CPM's counter, however, skyrocketed the song's popularity to such a level that even groups of Ayyappa devotees could be heard playing it, and even small children were humming it.

AIR SCARES

Over 2,400 aircraft faults in 5 years

SHEMIN JOY
NEW DELHI, DHNS

Technical faults were found in over 2,400 aircraft operated by eight commercial airlines in the past five years, with 382 incidents reported till November this year — the least annual number for the period, the Ministry of Civil Aviation has said.

Minister of State for Civil Aviation Murlidhar Mohol said in a written reply in the Lok Sabha that the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) monitors these defects by analysing Engineering Statistical Reports (ESRs) and defect reports submitted by airlines.

"All defects reported by airlines are investigated to ensure appropriate rectification and prevent recurrence. During the investigation, if it is found that the defect was caused by a careless or casual attitude or wilful negligence of technical personnel, the DGCA takes enforcement action against the erring employees," he said.

Twelve such investigations had been completed, and enforcement actions taken by the DGCA over violations by airlines. On seven occasions, said Mohol, financial penalties had been imposed on the airlines.

According to official statistics, revealed last Thursday, the highest number of incidents (524) was reported in 2022. Since then, such cases have shown a decline: There were 514 cases in 2021, but they dropped to 519 in 2023 and 472 in 2024.

Between 2021 and 2024, seven airlines — Alliance Air, IndiGo, SpiceJet, Vistara, Air India, Air India Express, Akasa Air, and Star Air — reported technical faults in their aircraft, while the number declined to six this year after the Air India-Vistara merger.

IndiGo has the highest number of aircraft reporting technical faults (787), followed by Air India (500), SpiceJet (418), Vistara (305), Star Air (168), Akasa Air (76), and Alliance Air (66), said Mohol.

Fault in our flights

524 There were 514 cases in 2021, but they dropped to 519 in 2023 and 472 in 2024

Highest number of **incidents** reported in 2022

In all, **382 incidents** reported till November this year

787 IndiGo has the highest number of aircrafts reporting technical faults

Followed by Air India (500), SpiceJet (418), Vistara (305), Star Air (168), Akasa Air (76), and Alliance Air (66)

BJP weighs RS seat for Nitin Nabin

ABHAY KUMAR
PATNA

The BJP's top leadership is mulling over a proposal to elevate the newly-appointed national working president, Nitin Nabin, to the Rajya Sabha in April 2026.

Nitin, who is an MLA from Bankipur in Patna, was anointed to the top party post last week. Two days after taking over as the national working president, Nitin quit as a Cabinet minister in the Nitish regime on December 16.

Rajya Sabha numbers

Five Rajya Sabha seats will fall vacant in Bihar in April 2026. Out of these five seats, two will fall vacant after the term of two RJD MPs, Prem Gupta and Amarendra Dhari Singh, gets over; while the term of the other two JD(U) MPs – Harivansh (Deputy Chairperson of the Rajya Sabha) and Union Minister Ramnath Thakur — will also end in the same period. The fifth seat to fall vacant is that of Upendra Kushwaha.

BJP working president Nitin Nabin addresses an organisational meeting in Puducherry on Sunday. PTI

The support of at least 41 MLAs is required to become a Rajya Sabha member from Bihar (which has 243 MLAs in the Assembly).

With the BJP bagging 89 seats in the recently-concluded Assembly polls, it will be a cakewalk for at least two BJP candidates.

Nitin Nabin, NDA sources said, has been sounded for the Rajya Sabha berth.

The JD(U), with 85 seats, can also secure two Rajya Sabha seats.

However, the RJD, which has been restricted to 25 seats, may not be able to field even one nominee. Even if it is assured of the combined strength of the 35 candidates of the Mahagatbandhan, it will be six short of the required number.

CAG finds 14,800 signal failures in South Western Railway over 5 years

Audit cites maintenance gaps, red signal jump & delay in collision-avoidance roll-out

AJITH ATHRADY
NEW DELHI, DHNS

The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has observed that substantial cases of signal failures at an average of 2,961 incidents per annum in the South Western Railway zone reflect poorly on the reliability and availability of signalling systems.

The country's top auditor tabled in the just concluded Parliament examined the performance of the Signal and Telecommunication Department of three Divisions, Hubballi, Bengaluru and Mysuru, of South Western Railway from 2018-19 to 2022-23.

"From 2018-19 to 2022-23, 14,808 signal failures/defects had taken place, at an average of 2,961 cases per annum. Out of the 14,808 cases, 8,547 were on S&T account while the rest, 6,261 cases were on account of other departments viz, Engineering/Operating/Electrical, etc," the audit report said.

"Despite the declining trend, cases of signal failures were substantial. Cases under the category —Miscellaneous were also significant (2,343 cases), which included cases of bad workmanship, lamp fused/blown off, route held up, etc. This indicates the need for a more effective maintenance mechanism to eliminate signal failures," the auditor observed.

It added that though the cases of accidents in SWR are declining, cases of 'Signal Passing At Danger or red signal jump' (SPAD) and wrong interlocking of points, which can divert trains to lines already occupied by other trains, are a cause for concern.

The auditor also observed that adequate time was granted to the signal department by halting the train operations. However, cases of signal failures continued to take place in substantial numbers.

The auditors found several cases of disconnection or reconnection of signalling equipment in contravention of Railway Board orders, which mandated that no disconnection/ reconnection should be resorted to without issuing a memo to the station master and obtaining approvals.

Auditing the provision of an indigenous train collision avoidance system (TCAS or KAVACH) on a low-density railway network for 1563 route km, the CAG said that the work was sanctioned in 2020-21 for Rs 469 crore. It added that even after a lapse of more than three years of sanction, the detailed estimate had not been prepared by March 2024, and its non-execution resulted in the non-availability of Train Collision Avoidance System (TCAS) in SWR.

Sharpshooter involved in Haryana court firing held in Guj

AHMEDABAD, DHNS: The Gujarat Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) on Sunday said it has arrested a Haryana resident who is accused of shooting a person at the Bhiwani court premises in September.

Officials stated that the accused, Vikas Jasbirsingh Sheoran, alias Golu, was arrested from Rapar in the Kutch district, along with another individual identified as Dinkesh, alias Kali, who was allegedly sheltering Vikas.

Vikas is believed to be a member of the notorious Rohit Godara-Naveen Boxer gang, which is involved in various criminal activities across Delhi, Haryana, Punjab and Rajasthan.

The shooting occurred on September 4 when Vikas, along with two other suspects, Ajay and Rohit, shot Lavjeet dead at the court premises .

"An inter-gang rivalry was the reason behind the murder of Lavjeet. In this regard, a murder case was registered at Bhiwani police station," the ATS said in a statement.

ATS officials said that in November, on the instructions of Rohit Godara–Naveen Boxer, Vikas took shelter with Dinkesh Garg alias Kali, who is originally from Haryana and was residing in Rapar, Kutch.

"During interrogation of Dinkesh, it came to light that he knew Naveen Boxer and on instructions from him, he had provided shelter to Vikas after the murder," the ATS said.

Gig workers seek pollution surcharge in Delhi

NEW DELHI, DHNS

A week after a parliamentary panel recommended that the government should direct e-commerce and logistics companies to provide masks like N95 to their delivery riders free of cost, as the capital is reeling under pollution, a platform for gig workers has demanded that they be given a 'pollution surcharge' during high-AQI days and facilities like health check-ups.

The Gig Workers Association has said large parts of Delhi-NCR have remained under GRAP-IV restrictions for the past week or so, and platform workers, including delivery workers, ride-hailing drivers, and last-mile logistics workers, are being forced to work long hours outdoors without any pollution allowance, health coverage, protective gear, or reduced work expectations.

One of their demands is to give them a 'pollution surcharge', which is an additional per-trip or per-order compensation for platform workers during high-AQI days. There should be provision of masks like N95, access to health check-ups, and coverage for pollution-related illnesses under platform-provided insurance, they said.

"Platform companies routinely impose surge pricing on consumers during periods of high demand or when conditions are inconvenient, such as rain, festivals, or peak hours. There is no justification for not applying the same logic to compensate workers during periods of unhealthy air quality," they said in a statement.

"Clean air is a constitutional guarantee and a core public-health concern. Until it is ensured, workers who keep cities running under hazardous conditions must be protected and fairly compensated," it said.

The association has asked the government to recognise air pollution as an occupational health risk for platform workers and issue binding guidelines mandating pollution-linked compensation.

PFI was sending cadres to Syria for training from IS: NIA to court

NEW DELHI, PTI: The National Investigation Agency (NIA) told a Delhi court that the Popular Front of India was trying to procure arms from the neighbouring countries and give arms training to its cadres, a special public prosecutor of the agency has said.

The submissions were made before Special Judge (NIA) Prashant Sharma on Saturday, who was hearing arguments on charges against 20 accused Popular Front of India (PFI) leaders.

Mediapersons were not allowed to cover the in-camera court proceedings.

Speaking to reporters outside the court NIA's special public prosecutor Rahul Tyagi said he argued before the court that PFI leaders were trying to procure arms from neighbouring countries and give arms training to its cadres.

On the allegations against the PFI leaders Tyagi said, "They were also sending their cadres to Syria to learn tactics from IS so that they could be implemented in India. They organised specific hit squads which were keeping a list of BJP, RSS and VHP leaders, and conducting surveillance on them."

The prosecutor alleged that the group was formed with the motive of radicalising the youth. "The case against the PFI and its leadership is that they formed the organisation to radicalise Muslim youth with a view to establishing a caliphate in India and to establish Sharia law," Tyagi said.

"They were organising camps, giving them arms training, radicalising them, and training them to wage 'Jihad' against India, for which they were collecting funds," the prosecutor said, adding that these submissions were made before the court.

The court has posted the matter for further proceedings on December 23.

MISCELLANY

◆ COMICS ◆

Blondie

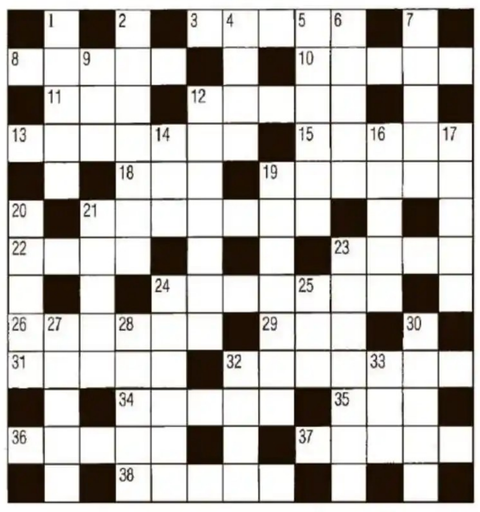
Hagar The Horrible

Beetle Bailey

Peanuts

Marvin

CROSSWORD CHALLENGE 12314



ACROSS
3 Lawn material (5)
8 Loses colour (5)
10 Hidden store (5)
11 Drawn match (3)
12 Group of witches (5)
13 Learn (4,3)
15 Assistants (5)
18 Craze (3)
19 Secret, mysterious (6)
21 Kills brutally (7)
22 Man's name (4)
23 Diesel oil (4)
24 Apart from (7)
26 Subsides (6)
29 Facial twitch (3)
31 Measuring stick (5)
32 Down payment (7)
34 Lowest point (5)
35 Rend (3)
36 Warehouse (5)
37 Young dog (5)
38 Kingdom (5)

DOWN
1 Ancient language (5)
2 Necessary (7)
4 Tumult (4)
5 Cuts wool from (6)
6 Of sound (5)
7 Verdant (5)
9 Racket (3)
12 Hugs (7)
14 Rowing blade (3)
16 Challenges (5)
17 Wait on (5)
19 Referee (7)
20 Javelin (5)
21 Wall painting (5)
23 Propriety (7)
24 Scold harshly (6)
25 Slope downwards (3)
27 Purchaser (5)
28 Male voice (5)
30 Quick (5)
32 Watch face (4)
33 Drink delicately (3)

CRYPTIC

ACROSS
3 It's said to come before meals (5)
8 Funny business with figures (5)
10 Streams able to put right ailments (5)
11 It's in the transport business (3)
12 Heard amiss to have made a hasty move (5)
13 Sort of watch on TV? (7)
15 Fixed higher by arrangement (5)
18 Except you can't quite get back by tube (3)
19 Free to maybe set out and walk (6)
21 Princely article in Canada (7)
22 Attraction of the river on the left (4)
23 Kill, say, about 50 (4)
24 Reduced price at the barber's? (3,4)
26 Economical new fur for a girl (6)
29 Link it erroneously with a foregone conclusion (3)
31 They can blow the lights out (5)
32 Qualified for a pass to freedom? (7)
34 In that place before getting to central Southend (5)
35 Quiet little chap, this crony? (3)
36 She's sorry for her friend at heart (5)
37 In a gale, perhaps, they can't flower (5)
38 How to spill rum with a murmur (5)

DOWN
1 Flier perhaps found no end boring? (5)
2 Worthy of taking a rise out of, for a laugh? (7)
4 It's true about Mr Gore (4)
5 Possibly caters for a famous run (6)
6 A downy bird (5)
7 May bring rain when it's terribly cold around mid-January (5)
9 Stick up some simpleton (3)
12 Like the nasty fault he corrected (7)
14 Some secret U-boat? (3)
16 The sort of deed to make your name? (5)
17 Go some days as a diarist (5)
19 Shake rattles and make people jump (7)
20 Chalky faced fellow? (5)
21 Giant imagined to be many times eyed (5)
23 How prices rise in the building business? (7)
24 A nut to chew when interrupting (6)
25 Help one with some ideas (3)
27 Truly this can be tricky to pronounce (5)
28 Be acquisitive, you understand (3,2)
30 Lighten with a song, we hear (5)
32 A name given with hesitation, I see (4)
33 Somewhat outrageous publication? (3)

SOLUTIONS TO CROSSWORD 2659

ACROSS: 1 Evince, 4 Bolthole, 9 Permit, 10 Milliner, 12 Watchdog, 13 Utopia, 15 Reel, 16 Uphill task, 19 On the level, 20 Mood, 23 System, 25 Baseless, 27 Reprisal, 28 Alpine, 29 Swan Lake, 30 Ardent.

DOWN: 1 Empower, 2 In retreat, 3 Cliche, 5 Ohio, 6 Telltale, 7 Own up, 8 Earmark, 11 Complex, 14 Liberal, 17 At one time, 18 Remedial, 19 Of sorts, 21 Dessert, 22 Feeler, 24 Sepia, 26 Bask.

◆SU-DO-KU-6783◆

		6			9			8
				8			7	6
				3	6	9	5	
		7						5
	1		4	9	5		2	
9						6		
	3	5	6	4				
2	6			1				
7			3			1		

hard

3	7	4	8	9	6	2	5	1
8	2	1	7	4	5	6	9	3
5	6	9	1	3	2	7	4	8
7	4	6	9	5	3	1	8	2
9	3	2	6	1	8	5	7	4
1	8	5	4	2	7	3	6	9
6	1	7	3	8	4	9	2	5
4	5	3	2	6	9	8	1	7
2	9	8	5	7	1	4	3	6

SOLUTION TO 6782

To solve the puzzle: To solve a su-do-ku puzzle, every digit from1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows, and in each of the nine boxes.

SCRABBLE™

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							Triple Word Score	RACK 1
U1	O1	M3	N1	F4	L1	A1		
							Triple Word Score	RACK 2
U1	S1	P3	R1	T1	A1	E1		
							Triple Word Score	RACK 3
I1	E1	S1	R1	V4	D2	R1		
							Triple Word Score	RACK 4
R1	A1	S1	S1	W4	H4	E1		

PAR SCORE 220-230
by JUDD

FOUR RACK TOTAL
TIME LIMIT: 20 MIN

DIRECTIONS: Make a 2- to 7-letter word from the letters in each row. Add points of each word, using scoring directions at right. 7-letter words get 50-point bonus. "Blanks" used as any letter have no point value. All Judd's words are in the Collins English Dictionary. JUDD'S SOLUTION TOMORROW

SATURDAY'S SOLUTION

D2	E1	T1	R1	A1	I1	N1	RACK 1 =	66
D2	I1	R1	I1	G2	E1	S1	RACK 2 =	59
G2	A1	L1	L1	A1	N1	T1	RACK 3 =	58
X8	E1	N1	I1	A1	S1		RACK 4 =	29
							JUDD'S TOTAL	212

PAR SCORE 140-150

JUMBLE

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME
By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek

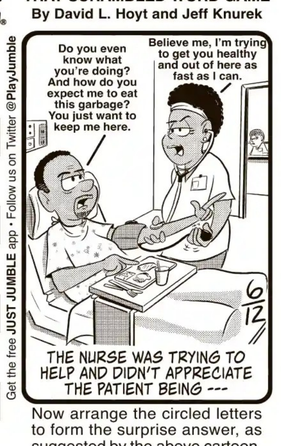
Unscramble these Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

LNBDE

PNEDU

MDYREA

GLIOBE


Do you even know what you're doing? And how do you expect me to eat this garbage? You just want to keep me here.
Believe me, I'm trying to get you healthy and out of here as fast as I can.
6/12
THE NURSE WAS TRYING TO HELP AND DIDN'T APPRECIATE THE PATIENT BEING ---

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Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Ans. here: ( ) - ( ) (Answers tomorrow)

Saturday's Jumbles: GLORY WAFER SHRUNK FABRIC
Answer: What's a dog's favorite type of chair? — A "BARK-A-LOUNGER"

HITORI-3237

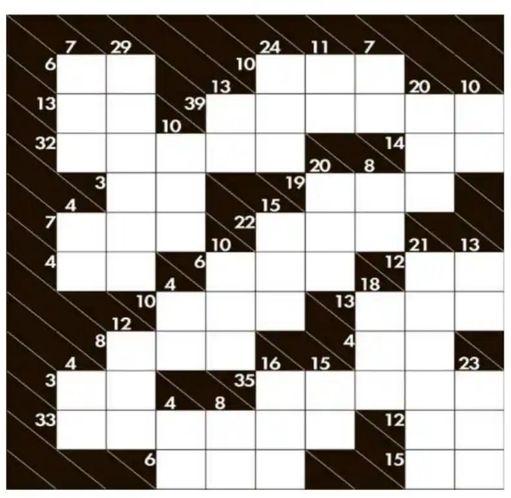
5	5	5	7	1	4	6	3
8	1	5	4	5	2	8	3
3	3	5	5	8	6	7	6
4	5	2	3	6	7	1	8
1	6	7	8	3	5	4	5
7	5	1	6	4	8	5	5
3	7	3	2	5	1	5	4
7	4	8	1	5	3	6	7

SOLUTION TO 3236

■	5	■	4	7	3	2	■
1	4	3	■	5	■	6	7
■	8	■	1	4	5	■	6
5	3	8	■	1	6	4	■
■	1	2	3	6	7	■	5
3	2	■	6	8	■	7	1
6	7	5	■	2	4	1	8
2	■	6	5	■	1	3	■

To solve the puzzle: Eliminate numbers by filling in squares so that remaining cells in that row or column do not repeat that number more than once. Filled-in cells cannot be horizontally or vertically adjacent. The un-filled cells must form a single component connected horizontally and vertically.

KAKURO- 3237



SOLUTION TO 3236

To solve the puzzle: Put a number from 1 through 9 in a cell. No zeros. A number in a cell separated by diagonal line tells the sum of numbers in consecutive cells at its right or downward. No number may appear more than once in consecutive cells.

SU DO KU X - 3773

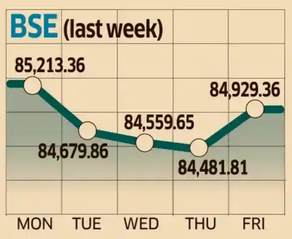
■	2						9	■
	■					■		
	6	■	3		1	■		
5	7		■		■			8
6			8	1		4	2	
1	4		■		■	3		
7		9			8	■	3	
	■				5		■	
2	1							6

SOLUTION TO 3772

8	5	7	3	9	2	4	6	1
1	2	3	4	8	6	5	9	7
6	4	9	5	7	1	8	2	3
3	7	5	6	1	4	9	8	2
2	1	4	8	5	9	7	3	6
9	6	8	2	3	7	1	4	5
4	9	6	1	2	5	3	7	8
5	3	2	7	4	8	6	1	9
7	8	1	9	6	3	2	5	4

To solve the puzzle: The objective is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column, each 3x3 box and each shaded diagonal line contains the same number only once.

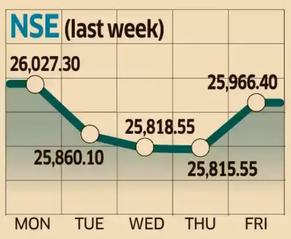
BSE (last week)



*Data as of Dec 19

TOP GAINERS		TOP LOSERS	
INFOSYS	2.56%	AXIS BANK	-4.33%
TECH MAH	1.92%	ETERNAL	-4.03%
TCS	1.94%	SUN PHARMA	-2.74%
SBI	1.79%	M&M	-2.07%
TMPV	1.53%	BAJAJ FINSERV	-2.02%

NSE (last week)



TOP GAINERS		TOP LOSERS	
SHRIRAM FIN	6.33%	AXIS BANK	-4.32%
INTERGLOBE	6.03%	JSW STEEL	-4.08%
TATA CONS	3.02%	ETERNAL	-4.03%
INFOSYS	2.53%	SUN PHARMA	-2.71%
TECH MAH	2.16%	ONGC	-2.16%

Sensex (52-week)

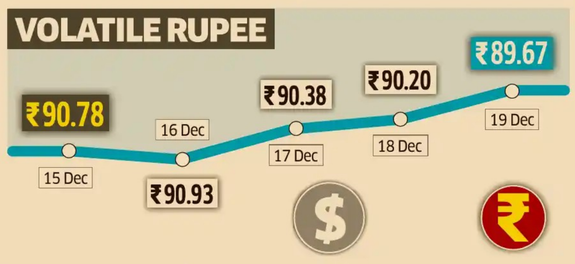
Dec 19, 2024	Dec 19, 2025	
79,218.05	84,929.36	7.21%

Nifty (52-week)

Dec 19, 2024	Dec 19, 2025	
23,951.70	25,966.40	8.41%

10-year Bond yield 6.60%

VOLATILE RUPEE



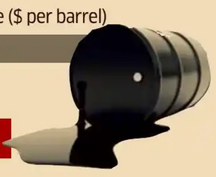
Exchange Rates*

Dollar	₹ 89.67	SGD	₹ 69.20
Pound	₹ 120.64	Yen (100 units)	₹ 57.75
Euro	₹ 105.67		

*Price at which banks sell

Crude Oil Rate ($ per barrel)

BRENT CRUDE
$60.47*
1.09%
*Rate as of Dec 19



Bengaluru fuel pump price*

(Retail)
Petrol* ₹102.92 ₹0%
Diesel* ₹90.99 ₹0%
*Rates as of Dec 20 #Rate change compared with yesterday

Commodity watch

COFFEE

Category	Rate (Rs per 50 kg)*
Arabica Parchment	₹ 26000 - 27000
Arabica Cherry	₹ 13750 - 15300
Robusta Parchment	₹ 16500 - 17000
Robusta Cherry	₹ 9600 - 10350

*Rates as on Dec 16

Other Commodities

Silkworm cocoon (Rs per kg)*

Bivoltine (BV)	₹ 793
Cross Breed (CB)	₹ 724

*Average rates as on Dec 19

NMIA gearing up to emerge as major cargo hub

MRITYUNJAY BOSE
RAIGAD, DHNS

When the Navi Mumbai International Airport (NMIA) at Ulwe in Raigad district of Maharashtra becomes operational on December 25, the spotlight will understandably fall on passenger capacity and connectivity.

Yet, quietly and strategically, NMIA, which falls in the larger Mumbai Metropolitan Region, is being positioned as something more consequential for India's economy: a next-generation cargo and logistics gateway designed to power trade, industry and regional growth.

Conceived as India's first truly multimodal greenfield airport, NMIA has been engineered with cargo at its core.

In its initial phase, the airport will handle 0.5 MT of cargo annually, scaling up to 3.25 MT in the final phase, placing it among the country's most significant air cargo hubs.

This capacity expansion is not incremental — it is foundational to supporting India's ambitions in pharmaceuticals, perishables, manufacturing exports and time-sensitive logistics, NMIA officials said.

Pharmaceuticals and perishables are expected to be early growth drivers. NMIA's cargo terminal includes dedicated temperature-controlled cool corridors, designed to maintain end-to-end cold-chain integrity for vaccines, biologics, seafood, fruits and vegetables.

In a region that already houses major pharma manufacturers and food-processing clusters, this capability directly addresses one of India's long-standing logistics gaps: reliable, compliant cold storage linked to air transport.

Beyond perishables, the cargo ecosystem has been planned for diversity and resilience. NMIA will feature specialised zones for dangerous goods, secured vaults for valuables, dedicated live-animal handling areas and on-site regulatory offices for Customs, plant and animal quarantine, and drug controller.

Strategically located near the Atal Setu and connected through national highways, urban arterial roads, Metro lines, suburban rail and planned water transport, NMIA is designed to compress transit times between factories, warehouses, ports, and aircraft.

The interior of a terminal at Navi Mumbai International Airport

Tiruppur struggles as orders from US fall

TIRUPPUR: India's Textile Address

Units in Tiruppur comply with rigorous specifications, factory audits, and requirements of global buyers

55% Tiruppur's share in Indian knitwear exports

30% The share of US in its total market

- Some even appointed third-party auditors in early 2025 to assess the capacity and capability of Tiruppur's export units to handle additional orders

Exports by Tiruppur firms:

2019-20	Rs 27,280 cr (51.3%)*
2020-21	Rs 24,750 cr (52.8%)
2021-22	Rs 35,834 cr (58.79%)
2022-23	Rs 36,418 cr (58.92%)
2023-24	Rs 33,045 cr (59.22%)
2024-25	Rs 39,618 (60.78%)
2025-2026 (From April to September)	Rs 21,137 crore

* Share in India's total knitwear exports

- Tiruppur makes fashion garments for global brands
- The US, the UK, and Europe are its key markets
- Major US brands including Walmart, GAP, Honest Baby Clothing, and Costco source garments from Tiruppur

Source: Ministry of Commerce/Tiruppur Exporters Association

If situation remains grim, losses could exceed Rs 10,000-crore mark

ETB SIVAPRIYAN
TIRUPPUR, DHNS

Rs 3,600 crore is what this knitwear cluster has lost since October, with fresh orders from buyers in the US drying up due to the 50% tariffs on Indian imports. This is in addition to the losses that exporters suffered after shipping finished goods to the US by offering steep discounts of 20-25% to buyers, following the tariffs coming into effect in August this year.

The loss of business from the US – in addition to the 50% tariffs, exporters have to pay a 16% duty – has forced many companies in Tiruppur, which primarily catered to the American market, to scale down operations, resulting in reduced work hours for labourers.

Thousands of migrant labourers who went to their hometowns in Bihar, Odisha, and Uttar Pradesh for the festive season have not returned as yet. Exporters said there are no major layoffs for now, since labourers who do not have work are being absorbed by other factories that are running at full or near-full capacity.

Over 30% of Tiruppur's exports are shipped to the US, and this major textile hub in Tamil Nadu accounts for over 55% of India's knitwear exports, with the cluster recording a revenue of Rs 39,618 crore in the 2024-25 fiscal.

"The Tiruppur knitwear cluster's monthly business with the US is about Rs 1,200 crore and we have lost it entirely as fresh orders are not forthcoming. No one can afford 50%," Kumar Duraiswamy, Joint Secretary, Tiruppur Exporters' Association (TEA), told *DH*.

"If the situation persists and is not resolved in the next few months, the losses incurred could be between Rs 10,000 crore and Rs 15,000 crore," Duraiswamy added.

If the standoff with the US is not resolved at the earliest, exporters fear that the buyers will shift to suppliers in their competition markets like Vietnam, Bangladesh, and Cambodia, which could threaten the existence of many players, especially in the MSME sector.

An exporter, on the condition of anonymity, told *DH* that one quarter has completely gone, with many players being forced to look for other markets like the UAE, which is also "over-crowded".

"We incurred heavy losses due to the 20-25% discounts we offered to our US buyers to get them to accept our goods. With no repeat orders, we are incurring further losses. All potential markets have been explored and we don't want to get into risky markets like Africa," the exporter added.

Duraiswamy and Raja M Shanmugham, past president of TEA, said it will be very difficult to get orders back from US buyers, once they shift to other countries, as they will get comfortable with those suppliers.

"US exporters are not getting repeat or fresh orders and there is a possibility that they might lose the buyers. Once the buyers find new suppliers, it is hard to get them back again," Duraiswamy said.

Shanmugham felt that the US tariff crisis has also made business difficult for those dealing with other markets as well, with large companies now invading the European market by under-quoting existing prices to EU buyers.

"Big players are switching over to these markets by under-quoting prices, making many in the MSME sector vulnerable and forcing them to the brink. When they quote a lower price, the reputation of the existing suppliers is affected with the buyer. They renegotiate the price, which will make MSMEs bleed as we already survive on wafer-thin margins," Shanmugham added.

Duraiswamy said no number of new markets can ever replace the US market due to its sheer size and volume of orders. "It is easy to ask us to explore new markets, but the bowl size is the same. We can't find new markets that can replace the US. American buyers order millions of pieces of the same product, while in the EU, the same volume would be split into different designs and styles," he added.

'Centre must help'

Besides the losses, the exporters are upset that the Union Government has not come forward to help the sector offset at least a portion of its losses due to US tariffs.

Shanmugham felt that since this crisis was spawned by geopolitical issues, the government should handhold the knitwear sector, especially the MSME segment, by subsidising the differential tariff gap with competitor countries.

"If such a thing is done, the exporters will be able to retain their buyers in the US and offset their losses. We need such extraordinary steps," he said.

Duraiswamy pitched in to say the situation was much worse than during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the government should come out with relief measures to help the sector.

"At least during Covid pandemic, we had business coming in and we repaid our loans. But now, we don't have business at all. We want the government to help us sustain it. They should give us a 20% EXIM scrip to enable us to survive and retain buyers. If the government helps us, we can consider accepting new orders," he added.

DH INTERVIEW

'Budget may bring some good news for affordable housing segment'

Premium and luxury segments have emerged as key drivers of growth in the real estate sector in recent years. In the post-Covid period, the premiumisation trend got further momentum, despite the government's nudge and incentives for development of affordable housing projects. The Confederation of Real Estate Developers' Associations of India (CREDAI), which represents over 13,000 developers spread across the country, says easier norms and further incentives are required to give a push to affordable housing. In an interview with *DH*'s **Gyanendra Keshri**, CREDAI president-elect **Gummi Ram Reddy** talks about the challenges in the affordable housing segment and expectations from the upcoming Union Budget for the real estate sector. *Edited excerpts:*

Real estate prices have jumped sharply in the past 3-4 years. What is your outlook for the coming years?

Our outlook is positive. In some markets in recent years, the price increase was 20-30% annually. Such a trend is not going to continue. This is not good for the sector. We believe in organic growth. 5-7% growth in price above inflation is good. For the industry, we are expecting 10-12% growth. Trends show 7-8 years of cycle in the real estate sector. It goes up, then there is some lull and it goes up again. So the long-term trend is always positive.

How do you see the progress in the affordable housing segment?

First, there is a need to revisit the definition of affordable housing. There are two key criteria. One is area, the other is price. Area is up to 60 sq metres in metropolitan cities and up to 90 sq metres in non-metropolitan cities. The value is up to Rs 45 lakh, both for metropolitan and non-metropolitan cities. The price is not realistic today. It has not changed for the last eight years. There is a need to change this. Property prices have more than doubled during this period. So we are demanding that the price cap for affordable housing be increased to at least Rs 90 lakh, or there should be no cap.

Gummi Ram Reddy

Then, what is the relevance of calling it affordable housing, when it does not remain affordable for the targeted segment?

This is a very complicated issue. The prices have gone up mostly because of land cost. Land is limited, and because of the population, the prices have gone up and will continue to rise. The developer has no control over it. If you want to make it affordable, the government will have to ensure land at an affordable price and also need to address construction and other costs. Registration cost is also a big element. In some states, it is as high as 12%. All these add up to the cost for buyers. We have suggested that for the affordable segment, registration cost could be brought down to 1-2%. This will directly benefit home buyers.

What are your expectations from the upcoming Budget?

Affordable housing has been a focus. We expect some good announcements on affordable housing. We hope that the price cap will be increased. The real estate sector is the second-largest employment provider after agriculture. The construction sector has been contributing significantly to GDP growth. We are expecting a continued focus on supporting real estate sector growth. Taxation is a major issue. We pay 18% GST on work contracts. It should be reduced to 5%. If the cost goes down, it will be passed on to the buyers. This is very important for the affordable segment.

Adani eyes engine MRO, P2F conversion foray

MUMBAI, PTI: Adani group plans to foray into engine MRO as well as passenger-aircraft-to-freighter (P2F) conversion, as the diversified conglomerate bets big on the domestic aviation market, according to a top group official. Besides airports, the diversified conglomerate is also present in the MRO and pilots training business.

The group entered the MRO segment last December following the acquisition of Air Works for an enterprise value of Rs 400 crore, strengthening its foothold in the defence MRO sector. Last month, it said it will buy a 72.8% stake in Flight Simulation Technique Centre for Rs 820 crore, marking its foray into the pilot training segment.

2025 REPORT CARD

Startup funding down by 15%; DeepTech, EnergyTech gain momentum

UMA KANNAN
BENGALURU, DHNS

Indian startups in 2025 witnessed significant momentum in terms of sectoral focus such as DeepTech and EnergyTech, and particularly, AI played a driving force behind huge fundraising. However, overall, the startup ecosystem raised only $10.79 billion in 2025, a 15% decline compared to $12.65 billion raised in 2024.

Market intelligence platform Tracxn shared funding data with *DH*, which shows that startups raised $10.98 billion in 2023, and $24.35 billion in 2022. During the Covid period, in 2021, startups raised a record equity funding of $38.93 billion.

The winning sectors for 2025 are manufacturing, AI, and financials, Sattva Ventures Founder Adrija Agarwal said.

"India is becoming the world's primary manufacturing alternative to China. Capital is pouring into startups that build electronics, semiconductors, and factory hardware because helping a country build its own essential goods is now a top priority. In the AI space, the focus has moved toward infrastructure and machines that run factories and warehouses," Agarwal said.

Meanwhile, financials are thriving because recent interest rate cuts have boosted the banking economy, drawing investors toward FinTech startups that provide credit and financial tools directly to businesses to help them scale.

In 2025, the FinTech sector raised $2.21 billion across 238 rounds. From 2020 to 2024, the sector raised total equity funding of $20.55 billion. While the DeepTech sector saw $1.52 billion fundraising, electric vehicle startups secured $1.50 billion funding in 2025.

Seed-stage witnessed a total funding of $1.1 billion in 2025, a 30% decline from $1.5 billion raised in 2024 and a 25% decline compared to $1.4 billion in 2023. Early-stage funding raised $3.9 billion in 2025, a 7% increase from $3.7 billion in 2024, and an 11% rise over $3.5 billion in 2023. According to Tracxn data, late-stage startups raised $5.5 billion, a 26% decline from $7.5 billion in 2024 and an 8% drop, compared to $6.0 billion in 2023.

"Investors have become much more cautious about time and now expect to see their money returned within 3-5 years. This has pushed most funding toward late-stage companies that are already proven. Early-stage startups face a tougher road and must prove they can be profitable quickly, to get noticed. Ultimately, 2026 is about certainty, scale, and backing businesses that are essential to the global economy," Agarwal said.

In 2025, consumer tech continues to evolve rapidly, creating opportunities for founders to build scalable products. Consumer AI, where tools and platforms that personalise experiences, automate workflows, or act as intelligent co-pilots, is gaining more strong traction, TDV Partners Founder and General Partner Ujwal Sutaria said.

"A broader theme of consumer upgrades, whether it's in education, wellness, or lifestyle, is creating space for innovative companies that help people live smarter, healthier, and more connected lives. New-age Indian brands are being built across multiple verticals, including fragrances, women's wear such as sarees, home linen categories like bedsheets and curtains, and broader home-care and home-decor products. These categories are expanding as consumers trade up in quality and design. The intersection of AI, consumer-first design, and real-world utility is shaping some of the most compelling opportunities in the startup ecosystem," Ujwal Sutaria said.

Another industry that is seeing traction is the entire blue-collar and grey-collar workforce opportunity, particularly models that enable Indian workers to access better employment globally. This is a massive, structurally growing space, and companies building transparent, efficient, or tech-enabled solutions for this segment are very compelling. India has a major opportunity to export manpower. Just like Indians lead global companies at the white-collar level, Sutaria believes similar opportunities will emerge for blue-collar workers.

India Tech recorded 42 IPOs in 2025, a 17% increase over 36 IPOs in 2024, and a 62% rise compared to 26 IPOs in 2023.

"2025 has been a defining year for the startup ecosystem of India. Whereas the earlier years were about nurturing unicorns, the focus of 2025 was on realising meaningful IPOs. These IPOs have yielded tremendous returns for early-stage investors and early backers of young startups. These returns to early-stage investors have brought the limelight to angel investing and inspired more people to evaluate and invest in startups, and a brilliant cycle is thus created. The momentum for the years ahead is clearly building," Inflection Point Ventures Co-founder Ankur Mittal said.

Overall startup funding for the last five years (2020 to 2025)

Year	Total Equity Funding (USD)	Number of Rounds
2020	11.53 B	2503
2021	38.93 B	3577
2022	24.35 B	3575
2023	10.98 B	2640
2024	12.65 B	2492
2025	10.79 B	1547

Sector-wise startup funding for 2020 to 2025

Tech Sector	Total Equity Funding (USD) (2020-2024)	Total Equity Funding (USD) (2025)	Number of Rounds (2020-2024)	Number of Rounds (2025)
Energy Tech	6.83 B	1.64 B	969	104
FinTech	20.55 B	2.21 B	2452	238
Deep Tech	6.33 B	1.52 B	1710	257
Electric Vehicles	5.36 B	1.50 B	656	72

Source: TRACXN

52 unicorns in Bengaluru

India hosts 124 unicorns, accounting for close to 6% of the global total, positioning it as the third-largest unicorn ecosystem after the US and China. As many as five unicorns were created in 2025, same as 2024. Bengaluru has 52 unicorns, followed by Gurugram at 20, and Mumbai at 19.

Bengaluru continues to lead in startup acquisitions in India, with 42 acquisitions in 2025, and 47 acquisitions in 2024. Mumbai followed with 24 acquisitions in 2025, and 24 in 2024.

India's unicorn ecosystem in 2025 remains highly concentrated, with Bengaluru, Mumbai, and Gurugram accounting for over 70% of unicorns.

Mutual fund investing: What kind of investor are you?

When we think about mutual fund investing, we often obsess over the "right" fund, the perfect allocation, or the best time to enter the market. But experience shows that investment outcomes are shaped far less by fund selection and far more by investor behaviour.

Over the years, three distinct types of investor behaviour emerge in the market.

The first type: the invest and forget investor

This group invests and largely forgets. They may run SIPs in a few mutual funds or index funds and rarely track market movements. Portfolio reviews are infrequent—perhaps once a year.

These investors are usually busy with careers, families, or businesses. They are not trying to outsmart the market or optimise every percentage point of return. There is no panic during market falls and no excitement during rallies.

What works in their favour is consistency. By staying invested and avoiding unnecessary changes, they keep costs low, pay minimal taxes, and allow compounding to work quietly in the background. Over long periods, many such investors earn excellent returns.

An old study done by Fidelity in the US showed that the best-performing clients were those who had either passed away or forgotten they had investment accounts.

The second type: the optimiser

This is, unfortunately, the most common investor today. They follow markets closely, review portfolios frequently, and constantly try to improve results.

They switch funds, adjust allocations, chase recent winners, and attempt to time the market over the next few months. Each decision feels sensible at the time, backed by data, opinions, or forecasts.

PRATIK OSWAL
CHIEF OF PASSIVE BUSINESS, MOTILAL OSWAL AMC

But this constant activity creates friction. Taxes, exit loads, and emotional decisions slowly eat into returns. Buying when markets feel comfortable and selling when they feel uncomfortable becomes a pattern. Over time, many such investors end up underperforming the broader market—often by 4–6% compared to a simple index—despite all the effort.

In trying to be smart, they become their own biggest risk.

In investing, activity often feels productive—but it is frequently the enemy of returns.

The third type: the deliberately simple investor

The final group understands markets well—but understands human behaviour even better.

These investors know that most activity does not add value. They prefer simple strategies, low churn, and long holding periods. Portfolios are reviewed occasionally, and changes are usually limited to rebalancing rather than constant switching.

They don't chase trends or react to noise. Even though they have the time and ability to monitor markets, they choose not to. Their discipline lies in knowing when not to act.

This approach may appear boring, but it is remarkably effective. By keeping costs low, avoiding unnecessary taxes, and staying invested through cycles, these investors often do as well—or better—than those who are constantly trying to optimise.

The real lesson

Markets reward patience, not busyness. Every extra decision increases the chance of making a mistake. In mutual fund investing, simplicity is not a lack of intelligence—it is a sign of it.

So the real question isn't which fund you own.

What kind of investor are you?

World's calmest stock market challenges options traders

The India NSE Volatility Index ended on Friday at an all-time low

BLOOMBERG

India's stock market has become one of the calmest in the world — so calm that it's prompting a rethink of strategies among players in the country's vast derivatives space.

Despite geopolitical flare ups and a recent global selloff in risk assets, the NSE Nifty 50 Index has barely budged for months as domestic money overwhelms foreign flows and derivatives trading curbs choke off volatility. The India NSE Volatility Index, a gauge tracking expectations for future swings, ended on Friday at an all-time low.

For the traders powering the world's largest options market by volume, that's making it harder to profit from the well-known strategies. Volatility is the engine of derivatives trading: when markets swing, investors pay up to hedge, and the cost of contracts rise. When stocks are calm, premiums shrink, eroding returns for option sellers and leaving traditional strategies less profitable.

"The market has become more efficient and competitive — that's meant lower returns for standard vol-selling strategies," said Nitesh Gupta, partner and derivatives trader at Karna Stock Broking LLP. "In this environment, trading desks will have to increase risk to make better returns."

A turning point came last year, when the Securities and Exchange Board of India launched a sweeping crackdown aimed at curbing speculative retail activity and addressing losses among individual traders. The regulator scrapped several popular weekly options, cutting out the very products that had amplified intra-day swings and drying out volume.

The impact is clear: While activity has bounced off from a low in February, notional turnover has averaged almost 240 trillion rupees ($2.7 trillion) a day this year, down 35% from 2024. It's the first annual decline since data going back to 2017.

That drop in derivatives activity has fed back into the underlying market: The Nifty 50 has moved less than 1.5% for 151 consecutive sessions, a run that's nearing a record set in 2023, and its three-month realised volatility has slipped toward 8 points — lower than in any major global market.

Meanwhile, the market's players have changed. Foreign funds have pulled some $17 billion this year — more than ever before — amid trade tensions with the US

and a lack of shares tied to the artificial intelligence boom. At the same time, local institutions have become the market's biggest owners, pouring a record surpassing $80 billion into the shares since January. They overtook foreigners in the first quarter, according to figures from data provider primeinfobase.com going back to 2009.

The tranquility hasn't translated into big rewards for equity holders. The Nifty 50 has gained 9.8% this year, much less than the 27% advance in the MSCI Emerging Markets Index and the 20% rise in the MSCI All-Country World Index.

One drag is valuation: India's benchmark gauge trades at 20 times projected earnings, above its five-year average and far richer than the 13 times for the broader emerging-markets index, according to data compiled by *Bloomberg*.

For derivatives traders, the new regime is forcing a rethink. Strategies often built around selling options and rolling short-term positions may not yield as much as they used to, according to Bhautik Ambani, chief executive officer at AlphaGrep Investment Management Pvt. And the elimination of short-dated contracts leaves fewer ways to express near-term views or capture premiums.

"The low volatility environment and reduction in weekly options contracts have hurt strategies that profit from options selling," Ambani said. But volatility is likely to rebound — it's just too low right now, he added.

WEEK AHEAD

Signs of improving FII flow to guide markets

Depreciation pressure on rupee could persist due to FII outflows

SIDDHARTHA KHEMKA

This week, we expect markets to trade in a range with a positive bias, following signs of improving FII participation (buying in two continuous trading sessions offering some relief after weeks of relentless selling) and a marginal recovery in INR vs USD. Several global markets will see subdued activity on account of Christmas and New Year holidays. Key macro data releases during the week include US and UK Q3 GDP, US consumer confidence data and India's Industrial Production for November 2025. Overall, market is likely to remain sideways, with investor focus gradually shifting towards the upcoming Q3 corporate earnings season.

In November 2025, India's CPI stood at 0.7% YoY vs. 0.3% YoY in October 2025, led by food price deflation. The impact of GST cut is visible on FMCG prices for the second consecutive month. Core inflation was at 4.4% YoY, marginally lower than the previous month. Despite a slight pickup in headline inflation, it remains well below the RBI's inflation target level of 4% and even below the lower threshold of 2%. For FY26, the RBI has revised its CPI forecast to 2% from 2.6% earlier. We expect the underlying weak inflation pressures to support the case for an additional 25 basis points rate cut in February 2026.

The Bank of Japan raised its policy rate by 25 bps to 0.75%, the highest in nearly 30 years, continuing its policy normalisation. This has been accompanied by a sharp rise in Japanese government bond yields, with 10-year yields nearing ₹2%, driven by tighter policy expectations and higher supply. While the move was largely priced in, higher yields have increased bond market volatility and created spillovers into global rates. The yen remains weak due to persistent rate differentials, though rising domestic yields are reducing the appeal of yen-funded carry trades, posing risks to global equity markets.

Last week, Nifty50 ended with marginal loss of -0.3% at 25,970, recovering from lower levels amid weakness in INR and heightened volatility in broader markets, while both Nifty Midcap100 and Smallcap100 indices ended on a flat note. Amongst sectors, Nifty IT and PSU Bank indices rose over 1% each, while Nifty FMCG followed with gains of 0.5%. Meanwhile, Private bank and Financial Services indices were the worst performers, falling by 1.4% and 1.1% respectively.

The RBI announced an open market operation worth Rs 50,000 crore, scheduled from December 18, 2025, aiming to inject liquidity into the system. This move should provide some support to the rupee amid a challenging global currency environment. Meanwhile, India's trade deficit narrowed sharply to $24.5 billion in November 2025, the lowest in five months, down from $41.7 billion in October 2025. This improvement was driven by a strong rise in exports (to the US) and a moderate decline in imports (gold, oil, and coal). The current account deficit (CAD) trajectory has a direct bearing on USDINR depreciation. USDINR closed at 90.7 on December 15, reflecting a 5.6% depreciation FYTD. We expect depreciation pressure on rupee could persist due to FII outflows and no India-US trade deal in the near-sight.

In a key event for the global IT industry, Accenture delivered 5% YoY constant-currency organic growth in 1QFY26, ahead of expectations and near the upper end of guidance, while maintaining its FY26 growth outlook. Discretionary demand remains steady with no visible macro trigger, but client engagement around AI is clearly maturing, shifting from pilots to data, platform and security readiness. Strong GenAI bookings of $2.2 billion (+83% YoY) and total bookings above $20 billion signal improving deal momentum. We expect AI services demand could begin to improve from mid-2026 as hardware-led AI capex intensity moderates and spending gradually shifts toward software, platforms, and services.

SEBI has revised the Mutual Funds Regulations, 1996 in December 2025, and we believe that these will have a lower impact on AMCs, brokers and distributors than what was envisaged in the consultation paper. The revised regulations, aim to simplify norms and lower investor costs, with a milder impact than initially proposed. Key changes include removal of the additional 5 bps TER (Total Expense Ratio), partial exclusion of GST and statutory levies from TER—leading to a 15 bps cut up to Rs 2,000 crore AUM and 10 bps thereafter—and a reduction in brokerage caps across cash and derivatives segments. Overall, the changes imply a cumulative 3–4 bps impact on equity TERs; after accounting for distributor sharing, the net hit to AMC yields is estimated at 1–2 bps, translating into a low single-digit earnings impact. Distributor earnings impact is expected to be marginal, while institutional brokerages are unlikely to see any material effect given current realisation levels.

(The writer is Head of Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Limited)

TOP PICKS

The data is sourced from Motilal Oswal Financial Services Limited

Astra Microwave (ID: ASTRAMICRO)	BUY	Upside +21%**	Last close ₹907 / Target: ₹1,100*
Crompton (ID: CROMPTON)	BUY	Upside +36%**	Last close ₹257 / Target: ₹350*
TCS (ID: TCS)	BUY	Upside +34%**	Last close ₹3,285 / Target: ₹4,400*
SBIN (ID: SBIN)	BUY	Upside +10%**	Last close ₹980 / Target: ₹1,075*
Sagility India (ID: SAGILITY)	BUY	Upside +21%**	Last close ₹52 / Target: ₹63*

* Target price has been calculated on the basis of fundamentals ** Upside refers to more value stock is expected to generate than its current price

Mcap of 6 most-valued cos climbs Rs 75,257 cr

New Delhi, PTI: The combined market valuation of six of the top-10 most-valued firms climbed Rs 75,256.97 crore last week, with TCS and Infosys emerging as the biggest winners.

Last week, the BSE benchmark declined 338.3 points, or 0.39%. While Reliance Industries, Bharti Airtel, TCS, SBI, Infosys, and Larsen & Toubro were the gainers, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Bajaj Finance, and LIC faced erosion from their valuation.

The market valuation of TCS jumped Rs 22,594.96 crore to Rs 11,87,673.41 crore. Infosys added Rs 16,971.64 crore taking its valuation to Rs 6,81,192.22 crore.

Anil Agarwal signals unbroken payouts after Vedanta demerger

NEW DELHI, PTI

"Dividend is in my blood," Vedanta Group chairman Anil Agarwal said, reaffirming commitment to shareholder payouts alongside pursuing the group's planned $20 billion expansion across businesses even after the proposed demerger.

The demerger of metals-to-oil conglomerate Vedanta Ltd into separate listed entities is designed to sharpen focus, unlock value and keep cash returns flowing without interrupting its capital expenditure cycle, he told PTI in an interview.

The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) on Tuesday approved the plan to split Vedanta into five different listed entities. After the demerger, the base metals business will be housed in Vedanta Ltd, while Vedanta Aluminium, Talwandi Sabo Power, Vedanta Steel and Iron and Malco Energy housing oil and gas business will be the other four listed entities.

"Dividend is in my blood," he said. "No matter what happens, there will always be a dividend payout by our companies."

Vedanta remains one of India's top dividend-yielding large-cap stocks, with dividend income constituting a significant component of shareholder returns in the last few years.

Dividend payouts declared in the current 2025-26 fiscal include Rs 7 per share first interim dividend (totalling Rs 2,737 crore) and Rs 16 a share second interim dividend (totalling Rs 6,256 crore).

Vedanta paid a cumulative Rs 29.50 per share in FY 2023-24 through multiple interim dividends and the total dividend payout in FY 2024-25 was around Rs 46 per share.

Agarwal said the demerger is planned to be completed by March 2026.

Outlining growth plans, he said Vedanta has laid out ambitious expansion plans across businesses.

$20 billion investment

It is investing a total of $20 billion over the next 4-5 years -- $4 billion each in oil and gas and aluminium, $2 billion in zinc and silver, $2.5 billion in power and the balance in iron ore, steel and other businesses.

Agarwal said silver production is targeted to be more than doubled to 1,500 tonne by 2030 from current around 700 tonnes, to meet India's domestic demand. Alongside, lead output is planned to be scaled up to 2 million tonnes per annum from current 400,000 tonnes.

The current zinc production of 1.13 million tonnes is planned to be expanded to 2 million tonnes at Hindustan Zinc Ltd, he said adding another 1 million tonnes is planned from Vedanta's zinc company in South Africa, positioning the group among the world's largest producers.

In aluminium, Vedanta plans to double capacity from the current 3 million tonnes, supported by captive mines and renewable energy-linked greenfield projects. The company is also setting up a 510,000 tonnes DAP fertiliser plant in Rajasthan, which will be expanded to 1 million tonnes in near future, he said.

In oil and gas, Agarwal said recent policy changes by the government have improved the investment climate. Vedanta aims to raise production to 3,00,000 barrels per day in the short term, scaling up to 0.5 million barrels per day over the next four to five years.

The iron ore and steel business will focus on producing green steel, leveraging access to gas and renewable power, with a proposed capacity of 15 million tonnes. The power business is targeting 25,000 MW of capacity, comprising 15,000 MW of thermal and 5,000 MW of renewable power. The group currently has a thermal power capacity of 4,200 MW.

"Capex is essential for manufacturing growth in India and we are committed to pursuing our aggressive spending plan," he said.

Agarwal said the demerger was chosen over asset sales or alternative restructuring to unlock the full growth potential of each business, including zinc, aluminium, oil and gas, power, and iron ore and steel amid strong and rising demand, particularly in India. "Vedanta is like a big Banyan tree. There is tremendous potential in each business, and each one of them has the potential to become a Banyan tree by itself," he said. "I have a vision that each company will be as big as Vedanta in terms of revenue. Effectively, we are creating five more Vedantas, which will make shareholders the happiest."

Shareholders of Vedanta will get one equity share of every demerged entity for every one share they currently hold in the company.

Explaining the rationale for the demerger, he said that globally most large resource companies operate as pure-play entities, focused solely on zinc, silver, aluminium, iron ore, power generation, or oil and gas, and Vedanta's proposed restructuring is aligned with this global model.

"Each of Vedanta's businesses - zinc, silver, aluminium, oil and gas, power, iron ore and steel - has tremendous potential. Demand is almost doubling, particularly in India. Demerger is the right thing to do to let each business grow on its own," Agarwal said.

On debt, he said the Rs 48,000 crore debt will be allocated to the demerged entities based on their respective cash flows.

Each company will have an independent board and professional management, and promoters will hold around 50% stake without involvement in day-to-day operations, Agarwal said, adding that aggressive capital expenditure and regular dividend payouts will continue post-demerger.

On the structure, he said all resulting companies will be pure-play businesses. Oil and gas will remain a standalone hydrocarbon company, iron ore and power will be single-product entities, while metals businesses may explore further vertical opportunities over time.

Anil Agarwal

Home loan book to cross Rs 10 lakh crore in FY27, says SBI chairman

NEW DELHI, PTI: SBI is poised to achieve another milestone with its home loan portfolio expected to cross the Rs 10 lakh crore mark next fiscal year, driven by robust demand and a favourable low-interest-rate regime.

"Today my home loan portfolio is more than Rs 9 lakh crore... this is the single largest business unit in the bank, over 20% of our total assets," SBI Chairman C S Setty said.

At 14% growth rate, SBI is well on the path to achieve a milestone of Rs 10 lakh crore home portfolio next financial year, he said. SBI's home loan portfolio crossed Rs 9 lakh crore mark last month, making it the biggest mortgage loan provider in the country. The bank closed FY25 with the home loan book at Rs 8.31 lakh crore, registering 14.4% growth over the previous financial year. SBI has built a home loan portfolio in a gradual and steady manner over the years - from Rs 1 lakh crore milestone in March 2011 to Rs 9 lakh crore in November 2025.

Besides, the bank has been able to contain non-performing assets (NPAs) in the segment to less than 1% due to its constant proactive monitoring. The bank closed FY25 with gross NPA in home loans to 0.72%, one of the lowest in the banking sector. Setty had earlier expressed optimism that the momentum in the RAM segment will drive 14 per cent overall credit growth during the current fiscal year. Retail, Agriculture and MSME segment, which is 67% of the total loan portfolio, has also crossed the Rs 25 lakh crore milestone in September. With the improvement in economic growth, SBI upped its credit growth target from earlier 12% to 14% for the ongoing financial year.

Munir tells Taliban to choose between TTP and Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, PTI: Chief of Defence Forces Field Marshal Asim Munir has asked Afghanistan's Taliban regime to choose between TTP and Pakistan, saying that a majority of militant groups infiltrating across the border comprise Afghan nationals.

Asim Munir

Addressing the National Ulema Conference in Islamabad recently, Munir also drew parallels between Pakistan and the state established by the Prophet 1,400 years ago in the Arab region (today's Saudi Arabia).

While official details of the address delivered on December 10 were limited, selected clips of his speech were broadcast on local television on Sunday.

Munir asked the Afghan Taliban government to choose between Pakistan and Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), saying that Afghan nationals form the major part of terrorism coming from across the border.

"In the TTP formations coming [into Pakistan], 70 per cent are Afghans," he said. "Is Afghanistan not spilling the blood of our Pakistani children?"

He reiterated his call that the Afghan Taliban should choose between Pakistan and the TTP.

Trump set to expand immigration crackdown in 2026 despite backlash

'Plan to hire thousands more agents, open new detention centres'

WASHINGTON, REUTERS

US President Donald Trump is preparing for a more aggressive immigration crackdown in 2026 with billions in new funding, including by raiding more workplaces — even as backlash builds ahead of next year's midterm elections.

Trump has already surged immigration agents into major US cities, where they swept through neighborhoods and clashed with residents. While federal agents this year conducted some high-profile raids on businesses, they largely avoided raiding farms, factories and other businesses that are economically important but known to employ immigrants without legal status. ICE and Border Patrol will get $170 billion in additional funds through September 2029 - a huge surge of funding over their existing annual budgets of about $19 billion after the Republican-controlled Congress passed a massive spending package in July.

Administration officials say they plan to hire thousands more agents, open new detention centers, pick up more immigrants in local jails and partner with outside companies to track down people without legal status.

The expanded deportation plans come despite growing signs of political backlash ahead of next year's midterm elections.

Miami, one of the cities most affected by Trump's crackdown because of its large immigrant population, elected its first Democratic mayor in nearly three decades last week in what the mayor-elect said was, in part, a reaction to the president. Other local elections and polling have suggested rising concern among voters wary of aggressive immigration tactics.

"People are beginning to see this not as an immigration question anymore as much as it is a violation of rights, a violation of due process and militarizing neighborhoods extraconstitutionally," said Mike Madrid, a moderate Republican political strategist.

"There is no question that is a problem for the president and Republicans." Trump's overall approval rating on immigration policy fell from 50% in March, before he launched crackdowns in several major US cities, to 41% in mid-December, for what had been his strongest issue. Rising public unease has focused on masked federal agents using aggressive tactics such as deploying tear gas in residential neighborhoods and detaining U.S. citizens.

In addition to expanding enforcement actions, Trump has stripped hundreds of thousands of Haitian, Venezuelan and Afghan immigrants of temporary legal status, expanding the pool of people who could be deported as the president promises to remove 1 million immigrants each year – a goal he almost certainly will miss this year.

A woman holds a poster against ongoing immigration operation 'Catahoula Crunch', in New Orleans, Louisiana, US. REUTERS FILE

DEPORTATION PLAN

- Trump plans to increase workplace raids despite political risks
- ICE and Border Patrol to receive $170 billion funding boost
- Trump approval falls amid aggressive immigration tactics

US pursuing third oil tanker near Venezuela

The US Coast Guard is pursuing an oil tanker in international waters near Venezuela, officials told Reuters on Sunday, in what would be the second such operation this weekend and the third in less than a week if successful, reports Reuters.

"The United States Guard is in active pursuit of a sanctioned dark fleet vessel that is part of Venezuela's illegal sanctions evasion," a U.S. official said. "It is flying a false flag and under a judicial seizure order."

WORLD AT A GLANCE

A swimmer dressed as a rocker dives into Lake Geneva during the 87th 'Coupe de Noel' (Christmas Cup) swimming race in Geneva. AFP

N Korea says Japan's nuclear ambitions must be stopped

North Korea said on Sunday that Japan's nuclear ambitions "must be prevented at any cost", after a Tokyo official reportedly suggested the country should possess atomic weapons, reports AFP from Seoul.

Pyongyang's reaction came after the unnamed official in the prime minister's office was quoted by Kyodo News on Thursday as saying: "I think we should possess nuclear weapons."

The official was reported to have been involved in devising Japan's security policy.

The Kyodo report also quoted the source as saying: "In the end, we can only rely on ourselves" when explaining the necessity.

Pyongyang said the remarks showed Tokyo was "openly revealing their ambition to possess nuclear weapons, going beyond the red line".

"Japan's attempt to go nuclear must be prevented at any cost as it will bring mankind a great disaster," the director of the Institute for Japan Studies under the North's foreign ministry said in a statement carried by official Korean Central News Agency on Sunday.

Two Indians held with narcotics

Two Indian nationals were arrested at Nepal's Tribhuvan International Airport on Sunday in connection with drug trafficking, police said, reports PTI from Kathmandu.

Indian national Ranjit Singh (33) was arrested at the arrival area of the airport with 4.284 kilogram of marijuana, they said.

Singh had arrived from Bangkok on a Thai Airways flight carrying the narcotic when a joint team of police from the airport security and customs offices intercepted and arrested him during security checks, police said.

Another Indian national, Punit Sharma (33), was also arrested from the airport parking area when he arrived there to collect the contraband, police said.

Both the accused have been handed over to the Anti-Narcotics Bureau of the Nepal Police for further action.

Revellers attend the winter solstice celebrations at Stonehenge stone circle near Amesbury, Britain, on Sunday. REUTERS

Imran calls for nationwide stir

Pakistan's former Prime Minister Imran Khan urged his supporters to gear up for countrywide protests following a 17-year jail term handed to him and wife Bushra Bibi in a corruption case, reports PTI from Islamabad.

Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi were sentenced to 17 years in jail each by a court on Saturday in the Toshakhana 2 corruption case.

Khan, 73, who has been in jail since August 2023, faces multiple cases launched against him since his ouster from power in April 2022. The Toshakhana 2 case involves alleged fraud in state gifts that the former first couple received from the Saudi government in 2021. In a conversation with his lawyers in Adiala Jail after the "military-style trial decision" Khan urged his supporters to stand up in protest after the decision, according to a midnight statement posted on Khan's X account.

19 new settlements in West Bank

Israel's Cabinet on Sunday approved a proposal for 19 new settlements in the occupied West Bank, the far-right finance minister said, reports AP from Tel Aviv.

The settlements include two that were previously evacuated during a 2005 disengagement plan, according to Finance Minister Betzalel Smotrich, who has pushed a settlement expansion agenda in the West Bank.

It brings the total number of new settlements over the past two years to 69, Smotrich wrote on X.

The approval increases the number of settlements in the West Bank by nearly 50 per cent during the current government's tenure, from 141 in 2022 to 210, after the current approval, according to Peace Now, an anti-settlement watchdog group. Settlements are widely considered illegal under international law.

Mourners attend a memorial for Bondi Beach shooting victims in Sydney on Sunday. AFP

At least 16 Epstein files disappear from US website

NEW YORK, AP

At least 16 files disappeared from the Justice Department's public webpage for documents related to Jeffrey Epstein—including a photograph showing President Donald Trump — less than a day after they were posted, with no explanation from the government and no notice to the public.

The missing files, which were available Friday and no longer accessible by Saturday, included images of paintings depicting nude women, and one showing a series of photographs along a credenza and in drawers. In that image, inside a drawer among other photos, was a photograph of Trump, alongside Epstein, Melania Trump and Epstein's longtime associate Ghislaine Maxwell.

The Justice Department did not say why the files were removed or whether their disappearance was intentional. A spokesperson for the department did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Online, the unexplained missing files fuelled speculation about what was taken down and why the public was not notified, compounding long-standing intrigue about Epstein and the powerful figures who surrounded him. Democrats on the House Oversight Committee pointed to the missing image featuring a Trump photo in a post on X, writing: "What else is being covered up? We need transparency for the American public."

The episode deepened concerns that had already emerged from the Justice Department's much-anticipated document release. The tens of thousands of pages made public offered little new insight into Epstein's crimes .

Some of the most consequential records expected about Epstein are nowhere to be found in the Justice Department's initial disclosures, which span tens of thousands of pages.

Russia denies three-way talks underway for Ukraine peace

Diplomats gather in Miami for talks on ending the conflict

MIAMI, AFP

The Kremlin on Sunday denied that three-way talks between Ukraine, Russia and the United States were on the cards, as diplomats gathered in Miami for talks on ending the conflict.

A day earlier, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had said that Washington had mooted the trilateral format, which would mark Moscow and Kyiv's first face-to-face negotiations in half a year, but expressed scepticism that they would lead to progress.

"At present, no one has seriously discussed this initiative, and to my knowledge, it is not in preparation," Russian President Vladimir Putin's foreign policy adviser Yuri Ushakov told reporters, according to Russian news agencies.

People walk in an underground passage past a rug decorated with an image of Russian President Vladimir Putin, which is displayed for sale in a street shop in Crimea. REUTERS

After revealing the US three-way proposal, Zelensky told journalists on Saturday that he was "not sure that anything new could come of it", and urged the United States to step up pressure on Russia to end the war.

But the Ukrainian leader struck a more upbeat note on Sunday, adding that "constructive" talks between US, European and Ukrainian negotiators were "moving at a fairly rapid pace", while cautioning that "much depends on whether Russia feels the need to end the war for real".

"Unfortunately, the real signals coming from Russia remain only negative: assaults along the frontline, Russian war crimes in border areas, and continued strikes against our infrastructure," Zelensky posted on X.

Russian envoy Kirill Dmitriev arrived on Saturday in Miami, where Ukrainian and European teams have also been gathering since Friday for the negotiations, mediated by US special envoy Steve Witkoff and President Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner.

Dmitriev "will return to Moscow, make his report, and we will discuss what to do next", Uskakov said.

The top Kremlin aide also told Russian journalists Sunday that he had "not seen" the revised US proposal to end the conflict.

Washington last month stunned Ukraine and its European allies by presenting a 28-point plan to end the war widely seen as caving in to the Kremlin's key demands, which has since been redrafted following Kyiv and Europe's involvement.

While little is known of the latest version, Kyiv is likely to be expected to surrender some territory -- a prospect resented by many Ukrainians -- in exchange for US security guarantees.

Moscow's troops have been steadily advancing at the eastern front in recent months, with Putin on Friday hailing the Russian army's territorial gains -- and threatening more in the coming weeks.

France to build new aircraft carrier, Macron says on UAE visit

ABU DHABI, AFP: French President Emmanuel Macron said on Sunday he had given the official go-ahead to replace his country's flagship, the nuclear-powered Charles de Gaulle aircraft carrier.

Emmanuel Macron

That vessel, the only nuclear-powered carrier outside the US Navy, entered service in 2001 following more than a decade of construction.

"In line with the last two military programming laws, and after a thorough and comprehensive review, I have decided to equip France with a new aircraft carrier," Macron said, speaking during a visit to French troops in the United Arab Emirates.

The decision to give the final go-ahead was made this week, he added.

"In an age of predators, we must be strong in order to be feared," Macron said.

Forensic officials work at the scene of an early morning shooting in Bekkersdal township, south-west of Johannesburg, South Africa on Sunday. REUTERS

9 dead, 10 injured in South Africa bar shooting

BEKKERSDAL (SOUTH AFRICA), AP: Nine people have died and at least 10 others were wounded after a group of gunmen carried out a shooting at a South African pub during the early hours of Sunday, authorities said.

The incident occurred just before 1 am in the township of Bekkersdal which is located 46 km west of Johannesburg. It is the second mass shooting in South Africa in three weeks.

About 12 unknown suspects in a white minibus and a silver sedan opened fire at pub patrons at KwaNoxolo tavern, in the Tambo section of Bekkersdal and continued to shoot randomly as they fled the scene, according to police.

"Some victims were randomly shot in the streets by unknown gunmen," the police said of the incident that left nine people dead and 10 hospitalized.

Maj Gen Fred Kekana, the acting provincial commissioner of Gauteng, told the AP at the scene that the gunmen, some of whom wore balaclavas, had one AK-47 rifle and several 9-mm pistols.

Police did not release information about the victims, but police spokesperson Brigadier Brenda Muridili confirmed that an e-hailing driver was among those caught in the crossfire. She said the driver had just dropped off a client.

QUIET SHIFT

Saudi liquor store opens to wealthy elite expats

RIYADH, AP

Saudi Arabia has quietly expanded access to its only store that sells alcohol, allowing wealthy foreign residents to buy booze in the latest step in the once ultraconservative kingdom's experiment in liberalisation.

There's been no official announcement of the decision, but word has gotten out, and long lines of cars and people can now be seen at the discreet, unmarked store in the Diplomatic Quarter of the Saudi capital, Riyadh.

The store opened in January 2024 for non-Muslim diplomats. The new rules allow non-Muslim foreigners who hold Premium Residency to buy. The residency permit goes to foreigners with specialised skills, investors and entrepreneurs.

Saudi Arabia, home to the holiest sites in Islam, has banned alcohol since the early 1950s. The store is widely seen as a way to cautiously test the controlled sale of alcohol.

Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, and his father, King Salman, have pursued a dramatic liberalisation policy in the kingdom, aiming to attract tourism, boost international business and reduce economic dependence on crude oil.

The kingdom, which adheres to Islamic Sharia law, has opened movie theatres, allowed women to drive and hosted major music festivals. But political speech and dissent remain strictly criminalised, potentially at the penalty of death.

Alcohol remains banned for the general public. The unmarked store resembles a duty-free shop. Its ownership remains officially undisclosed.

Security is strict. Every visitor is subject to eligibility checks and frisking before entry. Phones and cameras are banned inside, and staff even inspect eyewear for smart glasses.

The Associated Press spoke to several customers leaving the store. They spoke on condition of anonymity because of the stigma around alcohol.

Prices are sharply elevated, they said. Diplomats are exempt from taxes on their purchases, but Premium Residency holders are not. The customers described the store as relatively well-stocked, though some said the selection of beer and wine was limited.

The Premium Residency permit was created as part of the kingdom's drive to attract global expertise. Unlike other residencies, it doesn't require a Saudi sponsor, and it offers benefits including the right to own property, start a business and sponsor family. It requires high incomes or large investments to qualify.

Devon Conway

Conway joins elite club with back-to-back centuries

MOUNT MAUNGANUI, (NEW ZEALAND), AFP: The West Indies were 43-0 at stumps on Sunday on the fourth day of the third Test against New Zealand, needing a further 419 to win, after Devon Conway became just the 10th player in Test history to hit a double century and a century in the same match.

Brandon King was on 37 and John Campbell two not out off 50 balls as the West Indies began a record chase after being set a target of 462. No team has scored more than 418 in the fourth innings to win in Test history, but the West Indies must do so to square the three-match series after losing in Wellington and drawing in Christchurch.

New Zealand declared their second innings an hour before the close at 302-2 with Conway's 100 adding to his 227 in the first innings.

He became just the sixth New Zealander to score a hundred in both innings of a Test. Moments later Tom Latham became the seventh, moving from 80 at tea to 101, having scored 137 in the first innings.

Kane Williamson made 40 from 37 balls and Rachin Ravindra hit four sixes as he blasted 46 from 23 balls to take New Zealand past 300.

Latham and Conway had a mammoth 323 opening partnership in the first innings, and set a world record for the opening wicket in combining for 515 runs in the match.

Brief scores: New Zealand 575/8 decl & 306/2 decl in 54 overs (Tom Latham 101, Devon Conway 100, Kane Williamson 40 n.o., Rachin Ravindra 46 n.o.; Jayden Seales 3-36, Anderson Phillip 2-57, Kavem Hodge 2-80) vs West Indies: (O/n: 381/6): 420 all out in 128.2 overs (John Campbell 45, Brandon King 63, Kavem Hodge 123 n.o., Tevin Imlach 27, Alick Athanaze 45, Justin Greaves 43; Jacob Duffy 4-86, Michael Rae 2-89, Ajaz Patel 3-113) & 43/0 in 16 overs.

Unstoppable Karnataka reach quarters in style

BENGALURU, DHNS: Kashvi Kandi Kuppa slammed an unbeaten century as Karnataka reached the quarter-finals of the Women's U-19 one-day trophy, defeating Madhya Pradesh by 27 runs in their latest and final Elite Group D match in Hyderabad.

In a clash for the group's top position, Kashvi's 84-ball 115, laced with 17 fours and two sixes, took Karnataka to 264/6 in 50 overs. Her knock allowed the side to recover from 114/4 while skipper Rachitha Hatwar scored 56 at the top of the batting order.

In response, MP could only put up 237/7 in their full quota of 50 overs. Vandita Rao (3/34) and Nandani Chauhan (2/44) never allowed any of the MP's top-order batter to convert their good starts into a big knock, with Vaishnavi Vyas top scoring at 39. Both Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh (as group runners-up) qualified for the knockout stages, where Karnataka will take on Bengal on Dec 28 in Pune.

Brief scores: Karnataka: 264/6 in 50 overs (Rachitha Hatwar 56, Deeksha CD 25, Kashvi Kandi Kuppa 115 n.o., Karnika Karthick 40; Aayushi Shukla 2-41) bt MP: 237/7 in 50 overs (Ishana Swami 25, Vaishnavi Vyas 39, Mahi Thakur 33, Rishika Jain 28, Anaadi Tagde 28; Vandita K Rao 3-34, Nandani Chauhan 2-44).

◆ ON TV ◆

FOOTBALL

EPL: Fulham vs Nottingham Forest (**1:30 am, Tuesday**). **LIVE** on **Star Sports 3**, **JioHotstar.**

La Liga: Athletic Club vs Espanyol (**1:30 am, Tuesday**). **LIVE** on **FanCode.**

Africa Cup of Nations: South Africa vs Angola (**10:00 pm**), Egypt vs Zimbabwe (**12:30 am, Tuesday**). **LIVE** on **FanCode.**

CRICKET THIRD TEST

Awesome Aussies destroy England

Hosts crush visitors by 82 runs to seal the Ashes in style

ADELAIDE, AFP

Australia captain Pat Cummins said it felt "pretty awesome" Sunday after his dominant team won the third Test in Adelaide to wrap up the Ashes in just 11 days of play after some dogged resistance from England's tail briefly threatened a great escape.

England's last four wickets added 145 on the final day to be all out for 352 and lose by 82 runs after finally showing some fight in the series as they chased a record 435 to win.

Australia's Scott Boland removed last man Josh Tongue, caught by Marnus Labuschagne, to spark wild celebrations as the famous urn remained in Australian hands.

"It feels pretty awesome," said Australia captain Pat Cummins. "It wasn't easy today, but we got it done. The last two months have been a bit of a grind," he added. "But it's all worth it for days like this. That's when we are at our best ... it's good old-fashioned grind, and I love the toil from all the guys."

England had to win to keep the five-match series alive after being crushed by eight wickets inside two days at Perth and in four at Brisbane, with two more Tests still to play at Melbourne and Sydney.

England's demise in 11 days of play is the joint second quickest in more than a century, since the 1921 Ashes was completed in eight days, with their "Bazball" style of ultra-attacking cricket exposed.

"That dream is now over, which is incredibly disappointing," said England skipper Ben Stokes. "Everyone is hurting and quite emotional about it. It hurts, it sucks, but we ain't going to stop."

Stokes also took some positives from the way England battled, having demanded more fight leading into the match.

"That stuff I wanted to see, I've seen that this week. I think we can take a lot from this game," he said.

England's capitulation over three Tests is a far cry from the pre-Ashes hype where they were touted as having their best chance in a generation to win a series in Australia.

And it made a mockery of former fast bowler Stuart Broad's claim that the hosts had their weakest side in 15 years, written off by others as a "Dad's Army".

The reality for Stokes' men is that England have now gone 18 Tests since winning a match in Australia, dating back to their last series victory there in 2010-11. Their last three trips yielded one-sided scorelines of 5-0, 4-0 and 4-0, with more of the same on the cards unless there is a dramatic shift in their fortunes.

Brief scores: Australia: 371 & 349 bt England: 286 & 352 all out (O/n: 207/6) in 102.5 overs (Zak Crawley 85, Joe Root 39, Harry Brook 30, Jamie Smith 60, Will Jacks 47, Brydon Carse 39 n.o.; Mitchell Starc 3-62, Pat Cummins 3-48, Nathan Lyon 3-77) by 82 runs.

Series: Australia lead 5-match series 3-0.

PoM: Alex Carey.

Fourth Test: Dec 26-30 (Melbourne).

Australian players celebrate after defeating England in the third Ashes Test in Adelaide on Sunday to retain the urn. AFP

Cummins, Lyon doubtful for MCG Test

ADELAIDE, AFP

Elated Australia skipper Pat Cummins on Sunday said retaining the Ashes after just three Tests was "hugely satisfying" and vowed no let-up in Melbourne while casting doubt on whether he and Nathan Lyon **(in pic)** would play.

Australia have been dominant all series with their 82-run win in Adelaide coming on the back of eight-wicket thumpings at Perth and Brisbane, securing the famous urn with two Tests still to play.

"There was so much hype coming into the series, and you never really know how it will play out," said Cummins.

"So winning in three Tests is hugely satisfying for many reasons.

"A lot of the chat before the series was about how evenly poised it was going to be, and to win in straight Tests, it doesn't get much better than that."

There are only five days until the fourth Test starts in Melbourne on December 26 with Cummins adamant Australia will not be taking their foot off the gas there or in the final Test in Sydney, beginning January 4.

"The goal was to win the Ashes. But you're not going into a Test match not wanting to win, so we'll go to Melbourne and absolutely be desperate to win that one and Sydney," he said.

"And if we get 5-0, it's amazing but I can't say that's been spoken about at all. It's always just been about how we're going to navigate our way through to three wins."

Australia face going into the fourth Test without pace spearhead Cummins and veteran spinner Lyon. Cummins played his first Test since July in Adelaide after a long layoff with lower back issues and, while he came through unscathed, he said he may skip Melbourne to be on the safe side.

"We'll wait and see. Now that the series has been won, there might be a sense of job's done, and let's kind of reassess a risk," he said.

"So we'll work on it over the next couple days. I doubt I'll be playing Melbourne, and then we'll have a chat about Sydney.

"But certainly while the series was live, let's take on the risk and have a crack at it."

Minhas masterminds India defeat

DUBAI, PTI

India faltered against the big-hitting Sameer Minhas and the extra zip of pacers, suffering a massive 191-run defeat against Pakistan in a one-sided 50-over Under-19 Asia Cup final, here Sunday.

Pakistan lifted their second U19 Asia Cup, and as it is the norm now, there was no formal greetings between the players of two teams.

Once Pakistan posted a mammoth 347 for eight, riding on Minhas' 172 (113b, 17x4, 9x6) they needed a lion-hearted chase to clinch a ninth title in the tournament.

But the tall Pakistan pace troika — Ali Reza (4/42), Mohammad Sayyam (2/38) and Abdul Subhan (2/29) — hurried their top-order with consistent hard-lengths as India folded for 156 in 26.2 overs.

However, India's chase began on an explosive note despite losing Ayush Mhatre early. Vaibhav Suryavanshi hammered Raza for two sixes and a four to take 21 runs in the first over.

Pakistan defeated India by 191 runs to win the U-19 Asia Cup final in Dubai on Sunday. X

Aaron George too began brightly, caressing Sayyam for three fours in a row in the fourth over as India raced off the block at 10 runs an over.

But the game's course changed in the last ball of the fourth over. George was jostled into a pull by Sayyam, and all he could do was to sky the short-pitched ball to Mohammad Shayan inside the circle.

In the first ball of the fifth over, India suffered a body blow with the dismissal of Suryavanshi.

The left-hander went for a full-blooded pick-up shot off Raza, but the good-length ball, which had extra bounce on it, took the edge of the opener's bat and nestled in the gloves of stumper Zahoor Hamza.

Raza and Pakistan fielders celebrated wildly, and a few words were exchanged before Suryavanshi trudged off dejected.

India slipped from 49 for 1 to 49 for three in the space of two balls, and it was just the beginning.

Vedant Trivedi and Kanishk Chouhan too fell to snorters as Pakistan pacers made the flat ICC Academy pitch look like the Road of Bones.

India's last hope — even if feeble — was the presence of Abhigyan Kundu, and a drop on 12 off Subhan hinted at a possible shifting of fortune.

But all such hopes were trampled when Kundu's upper cut two balls later after his reprieve found Niqab Shafiq at third man.

Earlier, Pakistan opener Minhas struck a brilliant century as Pakistan motored to a humongous total. Minhas, the younger brother of Pakistan T20 player Arafat, went after every Indian bowler but was especially harsh on new-ball bowlers Kishan Singh and Deepesh Devendran.

Brief scores: Pakistan: 347/8 in 50 overs (Sameer Minhas 172, Usman Khan 35, Ahmed Hussain 56; Henil Patel 2-62, Deepesh Devendran 3-83, Khilan Patel 2-44) bt India: 156 all out in 26.2 overs (Vaibhav Suryavanshi 26, Deepesh Devendran 36; Ali Raza 4-42, Mohammad Sayyam 2-38, Abdul Subhan 2-29, Huzaifa Ahsan 2-12). **Result:** Pakistan won by 191 runs. **PoM & PoS:** Sameer Minhas.

Jemimah stars in India's comprehensive 8-wkt win

VISAKHAPATNAM, PTI: Jemimah Rodrigues **(in pic)** executed her shots with great skill and style en route to a scintillating, unbeaten 44-ball 69 as India crushed Sri Lanka by eight wickets in the first Women's T20 International here on Sunday.

Opting to field, India restricted Sri Lanka to a modest 121 for six after the visiting batters struggled to put away the loose balls, even as dew made its presence felt earlier than expected.

India completed the chase of 122 with as many as 32 balls to spare, as Rodrigues added 54 runs with Smriti Mandhana (25 off 25 balls) and 55 with skipper Harmanpreet Kaur (15 not out off 16 balls) to help the home side take a 1-0 lead in the five-match series.

While she played some delectable strokes during her stay in the middle, the highlight of Rodrigues' innings was the four boundaries she struck in a single over bowled by left-arm wrist spinner Shashini Gimhani.

Earlier, the swashbuckling Shafali Verma launched the India innings with three boundaries in the first over, but could not sustain that for long as Gimhani took a neat catch after the batter flicked Kawya Kavindi in the air.

Mandhana was lucky as she got a boundary off a thick inside-edge off Kawya, and then, Rodrigues played a late cut off Malki Madara to find the fence.

With India reaching 30 for one in four overs, Sri Lanka skipper Chamari Athapaththu brought herself in, and Mandhana rocked back to work the ball through backward point for a boundary before getting another four to bring up her 4000 runs in the T20I format.

Brief scores: Sri Lanka: 121/6 in 20 overs (Vishmi Gunaratne 39) lt to India: 122/2 in 14.4 overs (Smriti Mandhana 25, Jemimah Rodrigues 69). **Result:** India win by eight wickets. **Series:** India lead 5-match series 1-0. **PoM:** Jemimah Rodrigues. **Next match:** Dec 23 (Visakhapatnam).

Teen prodigy Anahat continues to rise spectacularly

17-year-old eyes LA Olympics glory after scintillating World Cup triumph

ADITYA K HALDER
BENGALURU, DHNS

Think about Indian squash and the name Anahat Singh is hard to miss. Being handed a Senior debut at the age of 14, that too at a big-ticket event like CWG 2022, the teen titan has continued punching above her weight ever since.

"The idea of throwing Anahat into the deep end that early in her career was to give her exposure," said Cyrus Poncha, secretary general of the Indian squash body (SRFI).

"She made it on merit too by beating higher-ranked Indian players in the trials. We didn't expect her to win medals from the onset, more of a foundation for the major events to come in the next Olympic cycle."

Fast forward to 2025, the youngest child of Gursharan Singh and Tani Vadehra of Greater Kailash I, Delhi is living up to all the promises. At just 17, Anahat is the women's singles World No. 28, a double Asian Games bronze medallist on debut, a double Asian Champion, and recently a World Champion at the World Cup in Chennai last week.

She was the youngest member of the team that consisted of Indian squash legend and Padma Shri awardee Joshna Chinappa, along with men's partners Abhay Singh and Velavan Senthilkumar. The quartet had a flawless run throughout the tournament, including their semifinal victory over squash giants and two-time champions Egypt.

Anahat, for that matter, had to fight hard world No. 44 Nour Heikal in an intriguing battle that stretched to the fifth and decisive game. Unlike the PSA tour, each game was a best of seven instead of the 11-point game.

17-year-old Anahat Singh achieved her career-best ranking of world No. 28 before India's World Cup triumph in Chennai recently.

Except for that rubber, Anahat won all of her remaining matches in straight games, including the final against No. 31 Tomato Ho of Hong Kong China.

Ask Anahat and her World Cup triumph sits atop all her success in her nascent career, irrespective of the fact that she became the first Indian in 15 years to win an individual medal at the World Junior Championships in Cairo this July.

"The World Cup medal is really special," Anahat told *DH*. "It has been a busy year for me in the PSA tour (professional tour) but winning the World Cup in front of home fans was a different experience. In Chennai, fans were rooting for every points you take, their backing in crunch situations made the difference too. It was a moment to remember."

Badminton to squash

Coaches and experts, who have often seen the youngster up close, have often expressed their awe about Anahat's aggressive game and feet movement. Her mother Tani described her as "a dog playing fetch" while her former coach and World Doubles Championships silver medallist Ritwick Bhattacharya compared her game to Pakistan great Jansher Khan, who was considered a pioneer of the game back in the late 80s and early 90s.

Turns out, her intuitive foot movement on the court came from her early days in another racket sports, badminton, as her father Gursharan, a former state-level hockey player, wanted his daughter to be a national champion in two sports. Anahat eventually followed her elder sister Amira's footsteps to squash but not before she claimed a few medals at the Sub-junior level.

It's destiny that squash and Anahat were always meant to be as her success at such a young age speaks volumes. The squash prodigy is not resting anytime soon as for her, all roads lead to 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.

"I am super excited with the Olympics in the picture this time. The CWG and Asian Games are also there next year and with the four of us already playing as a team and winning such a big event together gives us the confidence and get comfortable around each other," concluded Anahat.

Baychimo wins Indian 2000 Guineas

MUMBAI RESULTS

Second in demand, Baychimo, from the stables of Adhirajsingh Jodha and ridden by Sandesh, won the Indian 2000 Guineas, the second classic of the Mumbai races on Sunday.

1. Castlebridge Trophy - 1400M: Madison (Neeraj Rawal) 1; Ashwa Ankara (K Nazil) 2; Marlboro Man (Ramswarup) 3; Anaira (P Dhebe) 4; WB: 1-3/4, 1, 5-1/2L; T: 1:26.11; TB: N Karanjawala; Fav: Ashwa Ankara.

2. Synthesis Trophy (Div I) -1400M: All For Love (Yash Narredu) 1; Lucio (Trevor Patel) 2; Bravo Zulu (C Umesh) 3; Ensky (Merchant) 4; NR: Solidarity & Saseka; WB: 3, 3/4, 3/4L; T: 1:24.68; TB: Mallesh Narredu; Fav: All For Love.

3. PD Avasia Trophy (Div II) - 1200M: Eastern Monarch (Aditya Waydande) 1; Enforcer (Yash Narredu) 2; Ministry Of Time (Mustakim Alam) 3; Esteban (Neeraj Rawal) 4; WB: 1-1/2, 2-3/4, 3/4L; T: 1:10.37; TB: Sanjay Kolse; Fav: Enforcer.

4. Beautiful Stranger Trophy - 1400M: Earth (Ramswarup) 1; Red Bishop (Trevor Patel) 2; Opus Dei (Aidtya Waydande) 3; Scaramouche (Sandesh) 4; WB: Hd, 1/2, 2L; T: 1:23.30; TB: Sanjay Kolse; Fav: Red Bishop.

5. Faiz Jasdanwalla Trophy - 1200M: Admirable (Sandesh) 1; Invictor (Zervan) 2; Rambo (C Umesh) 3; Lorenzo (Yash Narredu) 4; NR: Hermanus; WB: 1, 6-1/4L, Nk; T: 1:10.88; TB: Pradeep Chouhan; Fav: Radiant Reign.

6. PD Avasia Trophy (Div I) - 1200M: Mriga (AS Peter) 1; Heaven's Rhythm (Yash Narredu) 2; El Moran (Antony Raj) 3; Youreforfame (S Kamble) 4; WB: Shd, Lnk, 1-1/4L; T: 1:10.70; TB: Prithviraj; Fav: Akitania.

7. Gracias Saldanha Memorial Million - 2000M: Tiepolo (Trevor Patel) 1; King Ke (Oisin Murphy) 2; Endurance (Antony Raj) 3; Pristine Glory (CS Jodha) 4; WB: 1-3/4, 2, 1-1/2L; T: 2:00.44; TB: Pesi Shroff; Fav: King Ke.

8. Indian 2000 Guineas - 1600M: Baychimo (Shiven Surendranath) Sandesh 1; Sovereign King (Antony Raj) 2; Namiri (Trevor Patel) 3; Western Star (Mustakim Alam) 4; NR: Giacomo; WB: Shd, 3/4, 1-3/4L; T: 1:34.40; TB: Adhirajsingh Jodha; Fav: Zacharias.

9. Gulamhusein Essaji Trophy - 1600M: Looking Like A Wow (Ramswarup) 1; Cornerstone (Ajinkya) 2; Absolute Gorgeous (Kuldeep) 3; Vincer (Aditya Waydande) 4; NR: Semburg, Simola & Giant Gold; WB: Hd, 2L, Nk; T: 1:37.07; TB: Subhag Singh; Fav: Brasilier.

10. Synthesis Trophy (Div II) - 1400M: American Eagle (Aditya Waydande) 1; Savage Peacock (S Kamble) 2; Bezalel (Sandesh) 3; Wrangler (Akshay Kumar) 4; WB: 1-3/4, 1L, Lnk; T: 1:24.41; TB: Shahzaan Shah; Fav: Bezalel.

Bengaluru dividends

I race: Rs 45w; 12, 13, 12p; Fc: Rs 133; Q: Rs 75; Shp: Rs 31; Thp: Rs 46: Tri: Rs 209 & 90; Ex: Rs 1,066 & 595.

II race: Rs 15w; 10, 12, 32p; Fc: Rs 25; Q: Rs 15; Shp: Rs 20; .Thp: Rs 68; Tri: Rs 125 & 83; Ex: Rs 1,073 & 786.

III race: Rs 31w; 12, 161, 19p; Fc: Rs 68; Q: Rs 29; Shp: Rs 35; Thp: Rs 45; Tri: Rs 282 & 255; Ex: Rs 511 & 187.

IV race: Rs 138w; 17, 10, 13p: Fc: Rs 427; Q: Rs 311; Shp: Rs 31; Thp: Rs 36; Tri: Rs 2,317 & 1,434 ; Ex: Rs 14,921 & 3,837.

V race: Rs 28w; 12, 15, 29p; Fc: Rs 212; Q: Rs 158; Shp: Rs 51; Thp: Rs 83; Tri: Rs 2,545 & 2,060; Ex: Rs 5,778 & 1,714.

VI race: Rs 107w; 20, 13, 16p; Fc: Rs 1,434; Q: Rs 691; Shp: Rs 29; Thp: Rs 44; Tri: Rs 4,679 & 2,228; Ex: Rs 47,601 & 20,400.

VII race: Rs 29w; 16, 12, 29p; Fc: Rs 55; Q: Rs 30; Shp: Rs 31; Thp: Rs 79; Tri: Rs 343 & 170; Ex: Rs 845 & 490. **VIII race:** Rs 32w; 12, 16, 26p; Fc: Rs 309; Q: Rs 131; Shp: Rs 46; Thp: Rs 52; Tri: Rs 1,458 & 974; Ex: Rs 8,638 & 5,553. **IX race:** Rs 34w; 17, 27, 48p; Fc: Rs 652; Q: Rs 392; Shp: Rs 87; Thp: Rs 146; Tri: Rs 25,640 (c/o) & 10,988. Ex: Rs 25,311 (c/o). **X race:** Rs 75w; 20, 75, 10p; Fc: Rs 11,462; Q: Rs 3,372; Shp: Rs 285; Thp: Rs 56; Tri: Rs 11,639 & 1,814; Ex: Rs 41,282 & 11,794.

I jackpot: Rs 2,21,279 (c/o). **Runner-up:** Rs 94,834 (1). **II jackpot:** Rs 3,75,421 (2). **Runner-up:** Rs 18,929 (17). **I treble:** Rs 64,108 (c/o). **II treble:** Rs 1,578 (29). **III treble:** Rs 3,702 (33).

(From left) Arnav Mithun, Sakshya Santhosh and Siddhanth M pose with their spoils.

Sakshya, Siddhanth wear U-13 crowns

BENGALURU, DHNS: Siddhanth M and Sakshya Santhosh emerged champions in the U-13 boys' and girls' singles respectively at the CVL Shashtry Memorial Karnataka State Table Tennis Championship at Canara Union here on Sunday.

Sakshya completed a double by lifting the Hopes girls' title, defeating Tamanna Nerlaje 11-5, 11-2, 9-11, 11-4 in the final. In the U-13 final, Sakshya showed composure in a closely fought contest, overcoming Lakshmi Aashritha 12-14, 13-11, 12-10, 11-1 to secure the crown.

In the boys' U-13 final, Siddhanth produced a steady display to defeat Arnav Mithun 11-6, 11-5, 12-14, 11-3 and clinch the title. In the Hopes category, Arnav rebounded to win the boys' title after beating Sharvil Karambelkar 14-12, 11-7, 10-12, 13-11 in the final.

Results: Singles: Boys: U-13: Siddhanth M bt Arnav Mithun 11-6, 11-5, 12-14, 11-3. **Hopes:** Arnav Mithun bt Sharvil Karambelkar 14-12, 11-7, 10-12, 13-11.

Girls: U-13: Sakshya Santhosh bt Lakshmi Aashritha 12-14, 13-11, 12-10, 11-1. **Hopes:** Sakshya Santhosh bt Tamanna Nerlaje 11-5, 11-2, 9-11, 11-4.

Uganda's Joshua Cheptegei celebrates after winning the international men's elite category race of the Kolkata 25K on Sunday. PTI

Cheptegei, Azimeraw win World 25K Kolkata

KOLKATA, PTI: Uganda's Joshua Cheptegei underlined his mastery of the distance to win the World 25K Kolkata men's race while India's Gulveer Singh and Seema rewrote the course records in their respective elite categories here on Sunday.

Ethiopia's Degitu Azimeraw produced a clinical performance to dethrone defending champion Sutume Asefa Kebede to win the international elite women's race.

Two-time Olympic champion Cheptegei stamped his authority early, dictating the pace from the flag-off and never relinquishing control.

He crossed the line in 1:11:49 to win his maiden title, finishing ahead of Tanzania's Alphonce Felix Simbu (1:11:56) and Lesotho's Tebello Ramakongoana (1:11:59) in a tightly contested podium finish.

Azimeraw broke away decisively and led from start to finish, clocking 1:19:36 in the women's race. Sutume settled for second in 1:20:28, while Meselech Alemayehu completed an Ethiopian clean sweep in 1:20:48.

The Indian elite races, however, provided the most compelling narratives of the day. Gulveer surged to the front of the Indian pack early, briefly mixing it with the international elite before powering home in 1:12:06.

FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

Arsenal celebrate Christmas on top

Gyokeres ends goal drought from the spot in 1-0 win over Everton

LIVERPOOL, AFP

Viktor Gyokeres ended a barren goal-scoring run from the penalty spot to send Arsenal back top of the Premier League with a hard-fought 1-0 win at Everton.

The Gunners had been usurped at the top of the table by Manchester City earlier on Saturday, but restored their two-point advantage despite another unconvincing performance.

Mikel Arteta's men needed a stoppage-time winner to see off bottom-of-the-table Wolves last weekend and struggled to cut loose against a depleted Everton.

However, one goal was enough to ensure Arsenal are top at Christmas for the third time in four years. In both the previous occasions, they failed to go on and win the title as they were reeled in by City.

Erling Haaland was City's inspiration once more in a 3-0 win over West Ham as he took his tally for the season to a remarkable 38 goals for club and country.

The difference in class between their respective number nines may prove to be what costs Arsenal a first league title in 22 years.

But their own Scandinavian striker at least ended his wait since November 1 for a goal.

Gyokeres had a penalty appeal waived away seconds before opening the scoring for a push by Jake O'Brien.

But from the resulting corner, O'Brien inexplicably raised his arms to handle Declan Rice's delivery and a spot-kick was awarded.

Arsenal's normal penalty taker Bukayo Saka stood aside to allow Gyokeres to hammer the penalty past Jordan Pickford. The league leaders had failed to win on their previous three Premier League road trips to allow City to close in, but ran into the Toffees at the right time.

Everton's tough task was not aided by the absence of three key players. Kiernan Dewsbury-Hall missed out through injury, while Senegal duo Iliman Ndiaye and Idrissa Gana Gueye have departed for the Africa Cup of Nations. Everton's lack of quality in the final third quickly showed.

Arsenal's Viktor Gyokeres celebrates after scoring against Everton at the Hill Dickinson Stadium on Saturday. REUTERS

Raphinha, Yamal headline Barca win

VILLAREAL, AFP: Barcelona wingers Raphinha and Lamine Yamal guided the Catalan giants four points clear at the top of La Liga with a 2-0 win at 10-man Villarreal on Sunday.

Brazil international Raphinha won and converted an early penalty before Villarreal's Renato Veiga was sent off before half-time for a late lunge on teenager Yamal.

The 18-year-old slotted home Barca's second midway through the second half, as they restored their advantage.

Results: On Saturday: Real Oviedo: 0 drew with Celta Vigo: 0; Levante: 1 (De la Fuente 90+4) drew with Real Sociedad: 1 (Kubo 45+1); Osasuna: 3 (Budimir 72nd, 82nd, Garcia 90+3) bt Alaves: 0; Real Madrid: 2 (Bellingham 38th, Mbappe 86th) bt Sevilla: 0. **On Sunday:** Girona: 0 lt to Atletico Madrid: 3 (Koke 13th, Gallagher 38th, Griezmann 90th+2); Villareal: 0 lt to Barcelona: 2 (Raphinha 12th pen, Yamal 63rd).

Rs 6 cr for gold-winning Olympians

BENGALURU, DHNS

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Sunday announced a prize fund of Rs six crore to prospective Karnataka-based Olympic gold medalists during the Karnataka Olympic Association (KOA) Awards function here.

"Our government is emphasising on sports. For gold-winning Olympians, we have announced a prize fund of Rs 6 crore. Silver medalists will be provided Rs 4 crore, while those winning bronze medals will get Rs 3 crore," Siddaramaiah said.

The chief minister explained that there would be a government order in January 2026 granting government jobs based on sports quota.

He said that a 3% reservation would be provided to sports achievers in the Police and Forest departments and 2% in other departments.

Noting that the Olympic Association, which began in 1958, was contributing to sports, he recollected that the foundation stone laying ceremony and the inauguration of the Karnataka Olympic Association building was done by himself.

Winners of the Karnataka Olympic Association 2025 awards pose with their spoils in Bengaluru on Sunday. DH PHOTO/PRASHANTH HG

"Just like Andhra Pradesh and Kerala, the Karnataka Olympic Association is also functioning on its own building. The association is encouraging all sports."

The KOA also honoured a group of accomplished and emerging athletes from the state, with shuttler Ayush Shetty and tennis player SD Prajwal Dev among the headline recipients.

Shetty, just 20, was recognised for his breakthrough triumph at the US Open Super 300 in June, where he snapped India's title drought on the BWF World Tour. The young shuttler produced a composed performance in the final to beat Canada's Brian Yang 21-18, 21-13 in the men's singles.

Prajwal, who represented India in the Davis Cup in 2024, spoke about his immediate goals after receiving the honour.

Golfer Pranavi Urs was another standout among the awardees.

Last month, she created history by becoming the first Indian woman to win a title in a mixed field, triumphing at the IGPL Invitational in Mumbai while competing against men. KOA also felicitated rising shooter Divya TS and hurdler Unnathi Aiyappa, the daughter of Pramila Aiyappa, highlighting the depth of talent emerging from the state.

Winners: B Unnathi Aiyappa (athletics); Ayush Shetty (badminton); Pratyanshu Tomar (basketball); S Tanvi (fencing); Nikhil Raj M (football); Pranavi S Urs (golf); Uday Naidu (gymnastics); Aishwarya V (kayaking & canoeing); Prajwal Dev (lawn tennis); Jagdeep Dayal (hockey); Sujan (netball); Divya TS (rifle shooting); Aakash KJ (table tennis); Sathish Basavaraj (Photographer); PS Zarina (former international basketball player); Mukund Killekar (former international boxer); VS Vinaya (former international hockey player).

Sukhman wears Amateur crown

KOLKATA, PTI

Noida golfer Sukhman Singh rang in early Christmas celebrations by capturing the Amateur Golf Championship of India here on Sunday.

Sukhman posted a dominant performance to defeat Harman Sachdeva of Haryana in the 36-hole final following an unassailable 7UP lead after 29 holes at the Tollygunge Club.

It is the world's longest-running amateur matchplay championship organised by the Indian Golf Union (IGU).

Sukhman Singh

With a hot putter and an impressive long game, Sukhman kept attacking the flags from the start of the final. He was all square till the sixth hole before going 4UP after 12 holes and remained 2UP after the first 18 holes.

Sukhman's father Simarjeet Singh is a former India No. 1 amateur and three-time winner of the Sri Lankan Amateur as well as IGU Mid-Amateur champion.

Even though Harman cut down his lead to three till 23 holes, Sukhman was at his dominant best thereafter, sinking birdie after birdie to go 6UP till the 25th hole. When he went 7UP after 29 holes, the tournament director declared him the winner.

Shaurya finishes second

HUA HIN (THAILAND), PTI: India's 22-year-old rising star, Shaurya Bhattacharya, faltered at the finish, but still finished second at the Final Stage of the Asian Tour's Qualifying School to secure his full playing rights for the Asian Tour 2026 season.

Bhattacharya, who looked to be on his way to a win, dropped three bogeys in the last seven holes and lost by one to Lin Yuxin, a two-time Asia-Pacific Amateur champion.

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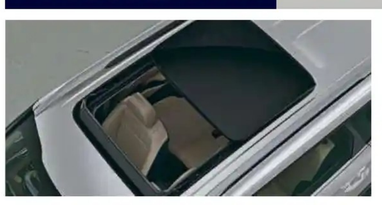

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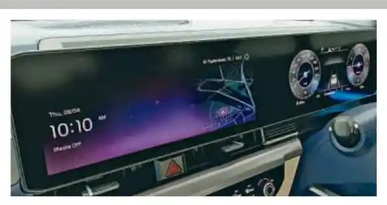

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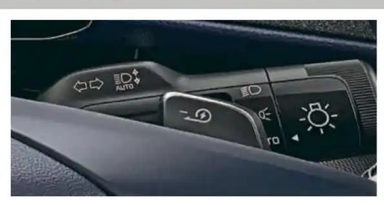

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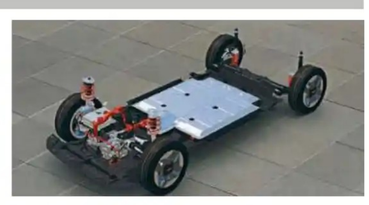

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